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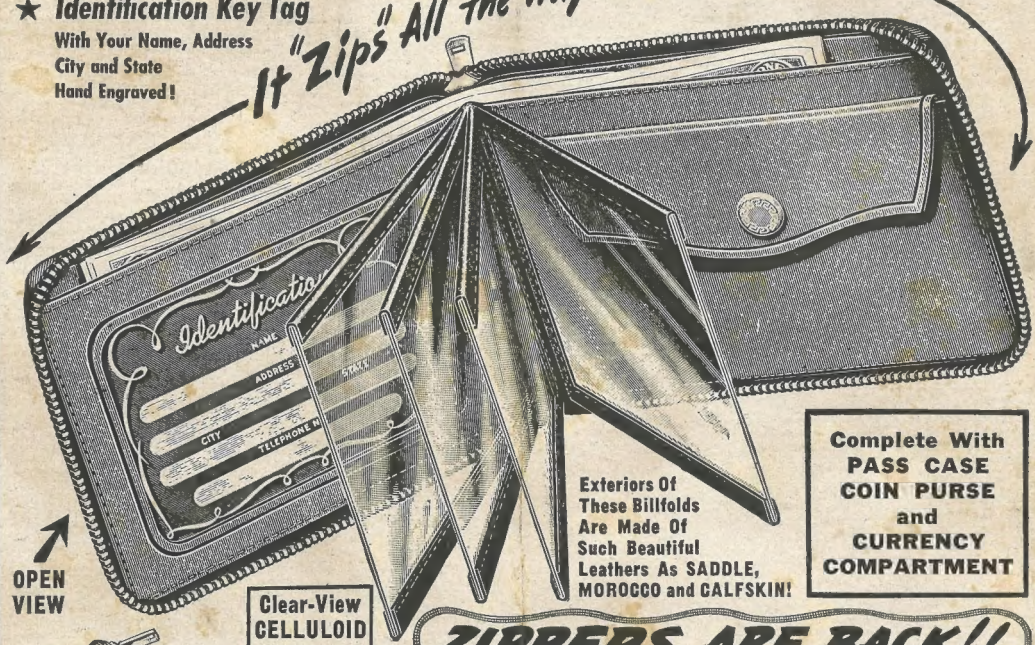

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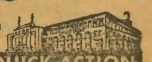

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Vol. 112, No. 6 for Best of New Stories

April, 1945

THE NOVELETTE

Port O' Danger.....KENNETH PERKINS 30

Henry Starr hadn't been in Porto Risco an hour before Senhora Clayburn's car had spattered his best suit of tropic whites with mud; a surly cafe waiter drenched him from head to foot with tepid soup; and the first taxi-driver he hailed ordered him to go hire himself a pushcart. And still Starr kept his temper, though it began to look like a deliberate conspiracy to draw him into a row. For he was a good-will ambassador and good-will ambassadors just can't afford to fight—and hope to accomplish their mission. It wasn't till the *capitaz* of Clayburn's rubber *estançia* had mule shoes nailed to his feet and left him to walk out of the jungle alone that Starr struck back. It was high time, he decided, to turn that port of danger into the safest haven for mild-mannered strangers the Amazon would ever know.

SHORT STORIES

Not So Tough Guy.....JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS 78

Captain Whalon of the *Willow* had a historical parallel for every situation and tried to run his pint-sized lighthouse tender like a battle-wagon. Take the time, for instance, we were sent out to help raise that sunken Catalina patrol plane in Clarence Straits. "Only a fool would attempt to start work till the weather moderates," said Lieutenant Pritchard, in charge of salvage operations. "Only a fool would have entered Mobile Bay but Farragut did!" retorted Whalon. "He said, 'Damn the torpedoes!' I say 'Damn the weather! Go ahead!' "

Beer Patrol.....RAY MILLHOLLAND 88

It was no bunch of Hollywood Japs, hired to run when the Marines let out a yell, that Privates Deal and Magurth were scouting at the edge of that island airstrip. Though reluctant to admit it they were just as glad to have a lonely Seabee with his pet bulldozer, Herman the Vermin, along for company. "Hell!" Deal remarked. "If they'd just give us Bull Bats one of them contraptions to ride in we'd be in Tokyo by now with this lousy war over!"

Published once a month by Popular Publications, 2256 Grove Street, Chicago 16, Illinois. Editorial and executive offices, 205 East Forty-second Street, New York City, 17, N. Y. Harry Steeger, President and Secretary, Harold S. Goldsmith, Vice President and Treasurer. Entered as Second Class Matter, October 2, 1935, at the Post Office at Chicago, Illinois, under the act of March 3, 1879. Yearly subscription $2.50, two years $4.50, three years $6.50 in advance in the United States, its possessions and all countries that are members of the Pan-American Postal Union. $1.00 additional for all other foreign countries. Single copy, 25 cents. Subscription Dept., 205 East 42nd St., New York, 17, N. Y. Trade Mark registered. Copyright, 1945, by Popular Publications, Inc. All rights reserved under Pan-American Copyright Convention. Printed in U. S. A.

BE OUT ON APRIL 11TH ◆◆◆

Up Where the Angels Sing.....JOE ARCHIBALD 96
A pair for the book, those two Fort gunners—"Little Big" Eddie Cantrell and Pete Sanger—with as different reasons for dreading the thought of death as any two airmen ever had. Captain Sherdel, the chaplain, felt they were his biggest problems, but he had hope for both. And the night The Pittsburgh Stogie caught its big package on the way back to Britain he knew he hadn't guessed wrong—and so did Little Big.

Oil Field Liar.....MODY C. BOATRIGHT 106
More "tall tales" of Gib Morgan which make the lumberjack legends of Paul Bunyan and Pecos Bill's fabulous exploits on the Texas plains seem feeble fibs by comparison.

SERIALS

The Drums of Galla (1st of 2 parts).....BARRÉ LYNDON 12
Five prisoners—four Italians and a German—sweated behind bars in the compound of the post at Galla. When the rains stopped Captain Foster, K.A.R. would take them to Meru for trial, for the war was over in East Africa and the region was being scoured of Axis offal. "They'll get their just deserts—those five—in Meru or Nairobi," Foster asserted but one man begged leave to doubt him. Johnny Craig—whose lacerated back was a relic of the Fascist Occupation—knew what punishment had already been decided on and that sentence would be carried out right there in the shadow of the wells at Galla.

Roger Sudden (conclusion).....THOMAS H. RADDALL 112
There comes a time when the soil of a man's birthplace means more to him than all the world. And so—with the thunder of British siege batteries leveling Louisburg to rubble—Sudden sees again the coast of Kent and knows at last on which side of the Channel he must make his death-stand.

THE FACT STORY

Blood from the Blue.....GORDON MacCREAGH 102
Rubies aren't the only precious stones that come from the fabulous Mogok mines in Upper Burma. Star sapphires—those blazing blue meteors—are also occasionally found. And the author of this article—you can try to decide how lucky or unlucky he was—came within sixty-two feet of finding the largest ever known.

VERSE

The Legend of Og.....LON WOODRUM 110
King Og was broad as a Bashan cow and tall as a Bashan pine. He gobbled mountains of smoking chow and guzzled down kegs of wine.

DEPARTMENTS

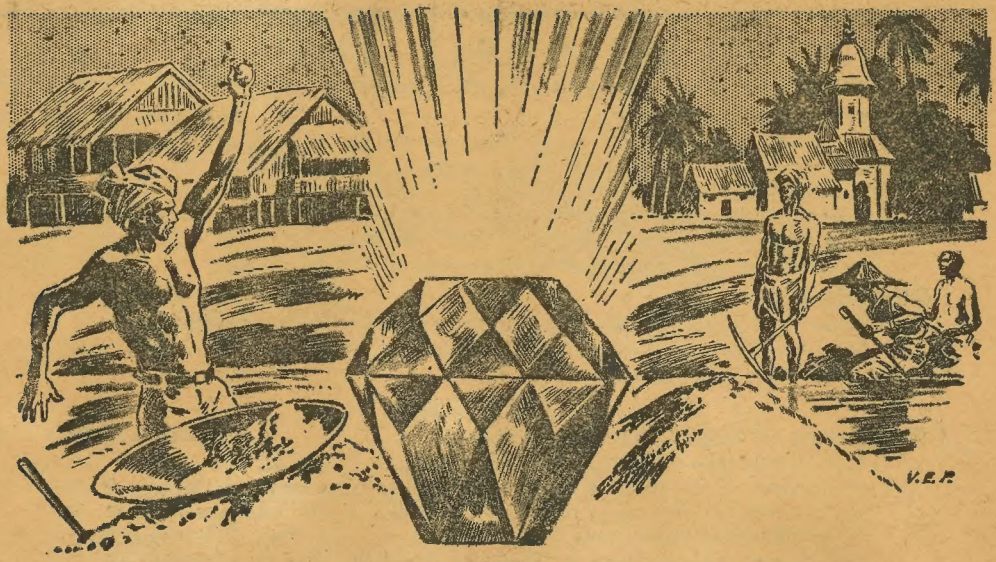
The Camp-Fire.....Where readers, writers and adventurers meet 6
Ask Adventure.....Information you can't get elsewhere 138
Ask Adventure Experts.....The men who furnish it 141
Lost Trails.....Where old paths cross 145
The Trail Ahead.....News of next month's issue 140

Cover painted for Adventure by John Newton Howitt
Kenneth S. White, Editor

IF YOUR COPY OF THIS MAGAZINE IS LATE—

We regret that, due to the difficulties of wartime transportation, your *Adventure* may sometimes be a little late in reaching you. If this should happen, your patience will be appreciated. Please do not write complaining of the delay. It occurs after the magazine leaves our offices and is caused by conditions beyond our control.

—The Publishers.



THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

THE following succinct UP dispatch under the headline *Burma GI Finds Two Star Sapphires* appeared in our evening paper the same day Gordon MacCreagh's "Blood from the Blue" arrived at our desk—

SOMEWHERE IN BURMA, Jan. 19.—After the war Pfc. Olin B. Starkey of Ivanhoe, W. Va., wants to return to Burma with a barracks bag and shovel.

During a recent night operation, Starkey stumbled on the soft sands of a beach. Two pebbles stuck to his hand, and he put them in his mouth to ease his thirst. Looking at the stones later he noticed a glitter in the center of each. He held two star sapphires.

We post-hasted a clipping to Mac with a request for *Camp-Fire* notation and commentary and from his skeptical reply we gather he wouldn't, on the strength of the story, urge any GI to attempt to wangle Burma service or assignment on even the slim hope that he might find himself with a brace of blue chips rattling against his bicuspids. Burma-wise Author MacCreagh points out: (1) that only one beachhead operation has been made during the whole Burma campaign—the recent *British* grab at Akyab—and that all other operations have been inland jungle stuff (and wonders how or why a Yank Pfc. happened to be invited along), (2) that if the beach operation in question was a river one—Irrawaddy or otherwise—there wouldn't have been any reason to pop a handful of pebbles into a mouth to allay thirst, (3) that, furthermore, star sapphires are not found on sea or any other kind of beaches but are mined, (4) that the bazaars in Myitkyina have a raft of cheap baubles and gewgaws for sale studded with the same kind of glittering chips that are to be found in costume jewelry in the five-and-dime emporiums at home, and finally, (5) that an amusing gag is worth a chuckle these grim days as much—or twice as much—as it ever was in peacetime.

As addenda to his exciting reminiscence on page 102 Author MacCreagh writes—

MOGOK RUBIES

This is the story of a man who missed his chance for becoming rich as a rajah's ransom because he just didn't have the guts to take it while it was good and dead sure.

The ransom was in rubies, and here was the chance:

The Mogok mines are some sixty miles up in the mountains from the Irrawaddy River. Once a week the whole output would be sent down to meet the river steamer. Transport was by *tonga*, an indestructible two-wheeled cart drawn by a team of four mules, relayed at every twenty miles. The road was unthinkable for a car. Some weeks the *tonga*, though indestructible, was pretty sick and in bed from having gone over the edge at one of

(Continued on page 8)

LIGHTER MOMENTS with fresh Eveready Batteries

"Private Jones reporting, 15th Infantry—with one of Tojo's supermen!"

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Continued from page 6

the hairpin turns. Then the ruby load would be a two-week collection; and sometimes even three weeks. The value would be variable, of course, but could be up into the couple of hundred thousand dollars. All this wealth, this being law-abiding British territory, was escorted by just two mounted Sikh troopers.

So this clever, but pusillanimous, lad figured it out. The get-away was the problem. The heavy jungle that bordered the road was made by Providence for the easy and safe bushwhacking of the two troopers. Non-arrival of the treasure *tonga* would not raise any suspicion at the river station until well into the next day. The steamer captain, as also the relay stations along the road, (staffed by dumb native mule grooms), would figure a breakdown somewhere along the line. That would allow pretty nearly 24 hours before Mogok police would come prowling.

Long and careful thinking enabled this clever lad to perfect a foolproof plan. To the east of the ruby mines, on the other side of a high mountain scarp, ran the railway to Lashio, that is now the terminal of the Jap-captured Burma Road. A mere hundred miles distant. The mountain range was terrific and the jungle was unexplored and "impenetrable," as all jungles are until somebody had penetrated them. But this good lad had done some hunting out of Lashio and had collected orchids in some of that jungle that didn't look any worse to him than any other jungle.

So here was his brilliant idea. He would cache him a fast riding mule in the jungle. He would take the Lashio train and would make a lot of talk about hopping off at a way station to take a few days after a tiger that he had heard about—and he would have a nice tiger pelt cached along with his mule.

And everybody would wish him luck and he would hop off at the way station and would hop onto his mule and cover ground over to the Mogok road. Then it would be the simplest thing to bushwhack the two troopers and the driver, grab the boodle, turn the animals loose into the jungle, shove the *tonga* over a cliff, and be back on the Lashio railroad in time for the twice a week return train; all with a nice tiger pelt stuffed into the top of his duffel bag.

Congratulations would be in order and not a breath of suspicion. The news of the "great ruby robbery" not even known yet.

It was as simple as all that. Dead sure. Dead safe.

And the clever lad who thought it all up just plumb didn't have the guts to go through with it. A mere three native lives stood in his way. If he'd killed one by accident he would have to pay a compensation of two hundred rupees to the man's widow. Sixty-five bucks. And the clever young man lacked the moral courage to make himself rich for life. And it is a penalty of Providence—if Lady Luck once hands you something on a silver platter and you don't take the chance, it'll never come again. It's a miserable truth. That good lad has been broke ever since.

That poor dope was ME!

ONLY one recruit to the ranks of our Writers' Brigade this month, Lon Woodrum, who chants the amazing "Legend of Og" on page 110. Bard Woodrum grabbed Pegasus as a kid and has ridden without any serious falls up till now. His verse has appeared in many periodicals including *The American Mercury, Judge, Free World* and others. A Missouri Irishman, he's traveled over all these United States and most of Canada, and between jaunts and verse devotes his time to article and radio writing for a network spot.

The actual history of the once mighty ruler who is the subject of the ballad is brief indeed (if it be history):

> Only Og king of Bashan remained of the remnant of giants; behold, his bedstead was a bedstead of iron . . . nine cubits was the length thereof, and four cubits the breadth of it.

That's from the Bible—Deuteronomy 3:11—and seems to be about the sum total of information available about the king. What a man!

KATHARINE S. HARRINGTON of Gilboa, N. Y. writes anent that disputed "Backhouse Battleship" that did, or did not, run the Vicksburg batteries in Carl D. Lane's article a few months ago, and about which Mr. James Thomas so took us to task in our December issue—

> One of the treasures of my childhood was a thick leather-bound volume of Civil War stories entitled "Camp, Battlefield and Hospital," which belonged to a great-uncle of mine, one Andrew Jackson Newton who had fought from the first Bull Run to that final field at Guilford Court House where Lee surrendered—and a similar book was owned by almost every veteran in town. It was a compilation from various sources, letters, personal memoirs, autobiographies, newspaper clippings, etc., and my investigations since have proved its sources to have been very accurate. I don't recall who compiled it, but included in it was a long and very graphic poem from somewhere describing in detail the very incident of Mr. Lane's story. My memory of the whole fails me, but the first stanza recounted that—
>
> Brave Porter deals in hard, dry pokes;
> He's also good at a clever hoax;
> In all his ways, for fight or fun
> This queer old scow is "number one."
>
> The building of the battleship by "Porter's boys" included the logs for guns,

(Continued on page 10)

Are YOU doing bookkeeping "chores"?

CLIMB HIGHER!

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IF you are doing the "chore" work of accounting as a bookkeeper, ledger clerk, cost clerk, billing clerk, or in one of the other many record keeping jobs—

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(Continued from page 8)

barrel smoke-stacks, mud hearths—and the backhouse—in these words—

> And then from some plantation stripped
> A small outbuilding, nondescript. . . .

In it, too, is the story of the blowing up of the captured steamer, the *Indianola*, which the Confederates were fitting up to "run and blast the Yankee's eyes" and the poem says that when the strange craft, which was seemingly impervious to shot and shell, passed the batteries of the fort the Confeds. blew the *Indianola* "to atoms."

Now all this would seem to me to indicate that the incident was of general knowledge, a sort of national joke, and not the figment of some story-telling soldier's imagination.

As to the precise General Grant's failure to mention it—that dry, efficient, military man's correct mind might, I am sure, lead him to chronicle many unimportant details so long as they were routine and included in military operations—but a joke like this? Come, now—did anyone ever hear of Grant's making a joke? My guess is he just ignored it. And, Mr. Thomas, don't worry about anyone's doubting the Johnnies could shoot. I had five great-uncles in that fracas and not one of them would have gone to the mat with you on that subject. By the way, for a tribute to Southern marksmanship, the finest I've ever seen was a little article by George Duff, printed in *Dairymen's League News* some twelve years back. Get a copy and read it, James; it's called "The Enfield Fire."

It begins to look like there may have been something in that nautical Chick Saler after all. How about it J. T?

THE exchange of letters between Author James Vale Downie and Reader Lloyd Emerson Siberell over the ferocity or non-ferocity of bloodhounds a few issues ago prompted the following from Mr. E. H. Douglass of Los Angeles, Cal.—

> I have been intending to write you regarding the story, "Bells of Breakbone," but not in reference to bloodhounds. The author speaks of the escaped slave, Jubab, as an experienced *millwright*, and later shows him as milling grain. There are many things I do not know and I would be pleased to learn if the term miller and millwright mean the same, or if the slave was both miller and millwright? I have always heard a millwright was a man who installed shafting, pulleys, belts, hangers and machinery in shops and mills. A miller one who ground, milled grain.

Mr. Downie answers—

> The term *millwright* as used today designates an expert in power transmission—one who installs shafting, belts, pulleys, etc.—but, prior to the Civil War and for several centuries before the development of steam power, it was the trade designation of a workman who specialized in small water-power installations for use mainly in creek-side flouring mills, primitive sawmills and irrigation pumps. This required more skill than simply pouring grain into a hopper and holding a bag under the spout. A millwright had to be something of an engineer, as well as an artisan and building mills was quite a business. Mills were about as numerous as filling stations are today in the rural districts. I have a map of Beaver County, Pa., made in 1817 which shows about fifty, some of them at locations which I feel sure could not have been reached by any wheeled vehicle. The farmers brought their grain on pack animals—as did the "twa jolly clerkes" in Chaucer.
>
> Most southern plantations were equipped with blacksmith forges, cobbler's shops, wagon shops (wainwrights) and flouring mills; and Negroes were taught such trades, often becoming very skillful. My purpose in presenting the character Jubab, in the story, "Bells of Breakbone," (ADVENTURE, July, 1944) as a millwright was to highlight his economic value. He was worth a long chase.
>
> My grandfather's farm, 25 miles north of Pittsburgh in Butler County, was a station on the "Underground Railroad." Many runaways stopped there on their way from Virginia to Canada. I have heard my father tell of being sent to the barn with a platter of food for an escaped slave, some time in the middle Fifties. This man was exhausted when he arrived, but, after a few days in the haymow, he recuperated. He was anxious to do something to pay for his entertainment. He said he was a carpenter. Grandfather needed a ground roller. The Negro asked for an axe, an adze, saw and a few other tools and went to work in a secluded woodlot. He cut down a whiteoak, trimmed it, framed it, tongued it and, when the job was finished, called his host to inspect the result. My father, a boy of six or seven, went along. He was more interested, he said, in the welts and weals on the colored man's back than in the roller, but he remembered that it was a fine bit of work—the barrel as round and true as though it had been turned upon a lathe. "There, son, you can read the constitution of the United States," said Grandfather. But I think Horace Greeley had said it first—in the New York weekly TRIBUNE, which Grandfather rode over to Bakerstown to pick up every week.

SEVERAL readers have already written in answering Mrs. William Carlson's query—printed here in the February issue—as to the title and author of that serial about Eric the Red and Leif in Iceland which ran in these pages some years ago. It was Roger Pocock's "A New Found World" and appeared through five summer issues in 1927. Thanks for jarring our memories, Commander Lincoln, Henry Morton, H. E. Pulling, Edward S. Sullivan and all.—K. S. W.

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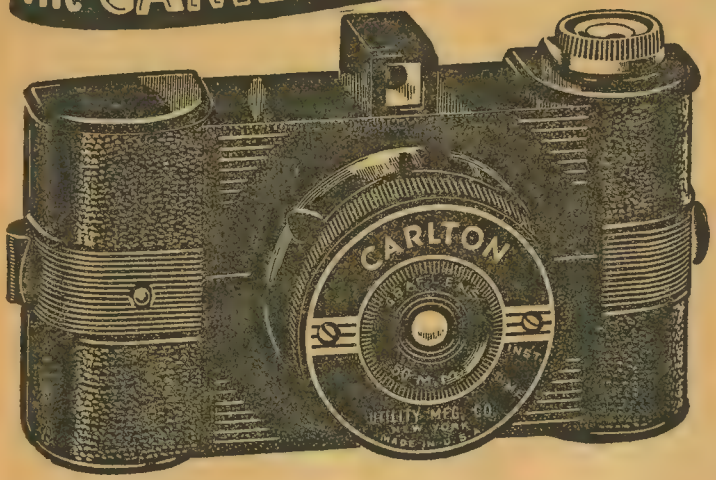

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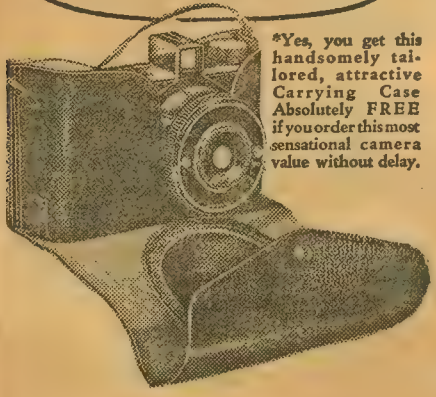

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THE DRUMS OF

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BY
CHARLES DYE

TWO MEN were approaching the wells at Galla. One was white; the other was black—and there were strange things about both of them. The white man had been born on the equator, and such men always walk apart from their fellows, odd and lonely. The black man had been born in the Habash hills of Abyssinia; he was very strong and, wherever he went, a cripple rode his shoulders, clinging like a monkey.

Although the two men had made no arrangement to meet, each knew that the other would

GALLA

By BARRÉ LYNDON

The men spoke respectfully as Craig went by. "Jambo, bwana Kragi!" some called. Kragi *was the best they could make of his name.*

be at the ancient wells. They were set in remote Kenya, in the angle between Somaliland and Abyssinia. The black man was still a week's journey away, but Craig would reach the wells within half a day's travel.

He wore shorts and a sun helmet with fraying edges. He was sunburned to a reddish-black, and his exposed legs had been badly scratched by wicked bush-thorns. He carried nothing except a flywhisk.

He was big, smooth-faced, barely twenty-eight, peculiarly quiet of manner. White men all over East Africa—out to the Congo and up as far as the Sudan—knew of Johnny Craig, but not many had actually seen him.

He was following a camel track. It had been flooded and made smooth by recent cloudbursts, and the sun had baked a surface firm enough to support a man. In traveling during the erratic rains, however, Craig risked being trapped by other cloudbursts, and bogged.

The track bent constantly, frequently diverted by twenty-foot, red clay ant hills. But no matter how much it twisted, the track always persisted in the direction of a flat-topped acacia tree. This was the only thing in sight which

threw any real shade, offering a resting place.

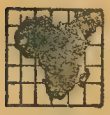
Craig paused when he reached it. He had outdistanced his native servants, and it was some minutes before they came in sight.

One was Jeko. He carried a big head-load and was typical of the Chuka tribesmen who live exactly on the equator, by Mount Kenya. He was thickset and ugly, his eyes were lightish brown, and he had six toes on each foot. He was ashamed of this and, whenever he could, he wore sandals.

The other man was a stiff-walking Masai, beautifully muscled, with bright eyes and a skin remarkably sleek from a diet which was largely blood and milk. He carried a canvas water-bag and a sheaf of spears, one of which had a three-foot blade. He had a musical name, Karioki.

Craig rinsed his mouth, and Karioki used a rag to catch the dribble of water which was spilled from the bag. He dabbed a little clay onto the damp rag and, squatting at the foot of the acacia tree, began to polish the long blade of his war spear.

He did this at each halt. He wanted the spear to be slick and shining, ready for the killing which all men said would come after Johnny Craig arrived at the Galla wells.



THERE were forty wells at Galla. They had been silted up when the district commissioner, Robert Armstrong, had first been appointed to the place. He had cleared them and all now bore water except the Well of God, which had become dry.

Armstrong had established a proper post, enclosing it with a fence, but only the naked timbers of this now remained. Its barbed wire had been torn out and employed in the hasty construction of a much smaller, much stouter fence around the little flat-roofed jail.

Four Italians and a German were held prisoner here. They were exercised during the very early morning, and the rest of the day they were kept out of sight, sweating behind bars. Work on the fence never stopped and, each day, it was made stronger; not because the prisoners might escape, but to protect them.

Armstrong sat drinking sundowners, lounging on the porch of a one-roomed house, and looking toward the fence. The house had lime-washed walls a yard thick, and brown palm-thatching that was full of lizards. There were two other houses like it in the post. There was also a small guest hut and, away off, a double row of huts for the *askaris*—native soldiers and police. The only other buildings in the post were a little radio hut, the storehouse and Armstrong's office; all of these stood beside the jail, inside the thick fence.

The commissioner had a rounded face and a ragged mustache, and hair that was thin rather than gray. For more than twenty years he had done duty in outposts like Galla; he was accustomed to their loneliness, and this was the first time that he had ever had company during the rains.

Sitting with him was Captain Kimber Foster, who had been seconded to the King's African Rifles after a shoulder wound in Libya; at times, his left arm still reflected the hurt. Strongly built, Foster was a devil in his way, and he had some quality which women found attractive. He was much younger than Armstrong, only a little more than thirty. He had fine courage, and his lightweight, light-tinted London-tailored khaki had a real soldier's trimness.

He had brought the Italians and the German down on a truck, and premature rains had stopped him at Galla. His orders had been to deliver the men to K.A.R. headquarters at Meru, three hundred miles south, where roads and civilization began. After that, he thought, they would be sent on to Nairobi.

Like Armstrong, he was drinking Scotch and studying the strands of bright new wire and the heavy stakes with which he had stiffened the jail fence during that day. It had to be strong and high and thick because vicious Boran tribesmen were gathering at Galla. Also, Somalis were arriving out of Jubaland and, during the last few days, grim Habash had appeared from the distant Abyssinian hills. Any one of these natives would have pushed a spear into any of the prisoners, could they have come near enough. They had good reasons.

One of the Italians, handsome Nicolo Bertelli, had been *commissario* in the Boran district. Among other things, in subduing the local tribesmen, he had sent one of their chiefs up in a Savoia Marchetti, and had him pushed out at two thousand feet, as an example to others watching from below. The son of Giorgis, the dead chief, was now camped in the bush outside Galla, with many Boran tribesmen.

The other three Italians had been *residentes*, and they had followed Bertelli's precepts for the subjugation of both Abyssinians and Somalis.

The German prisoner was named Hermann Richther, and he had been particularly interested in helping the Italians secure control of the Habash hills. This was special territory, because the hills concealed mines from which had come the Queen of Sheba's jewels.

The five men had been held prisoner ever since the Italians had been cleared out of Abyssinia and Somaliland and, ultimately, out of North Africa. Although Captain Kim Foster had been told nothing officially, he understood that they were being moved down country so they could be tried for war crimes in a place clear of local prejudices. It was, however, impossible for him to take them beyond Galla until the rains were done, and there were times when he wondered whether he would get any further south with them at all; because when

he looked toward the surrounding thornbush during the sundown hour, he always saw a frightening thing.

The smoke of evening cooking fires rose on the still air, marking the camps of vengeful tribesmen. Each evening, Foster saw more columns than there had been the evening before, forming a tenuous outer fence which completely enclosed Galla, with its wells and its five prisoners.

He made calculations now, looking beyond the jail and the feathery bamboos which stood near the Well of God, and said, "There must be a couple of thousand natives around us now!"

"Fully that," Armstrong agreed.

"Sooner or later, they're going to rush the jail," Foster told him.

"They could have done that days ago, if they'd wanted to. I think they're waiting for something."

"What?" asked Foster.

"They might be waiting for Johnny Craig," the commissioner answered. "I've heard native chatter that he's on his way up here."

"If he is," Foster said softly, "Johnny will be coming after the German!"

He jerked suddenly to his feet, and Armstrong eased himself out of his chair as hanging cords swished in the doorway at the back of the porch and they were joined by the only white woman within five hundred miles.

ARMSTRONG had heard about Laura Shepherd long before she drove into his post. She was dark-haired, and her eyes were dark, and she had a physical richness. Unlike most white women in Africa, who are pale because they keep out of the sun, Laura cautiously sunned herself every morning; this had given her skin a faint tan which was enormously attractive.

She had arrived on a safari car, followed by a truckload of furnishings. She was on her way to join her husband, who was administering part of captured Italian Somaliland; she had been stopped at Galla by the early rains, and by news that recalcitrant Ogaden tribesmen were raiding in her husband's territory.

Laura was slim and lithe, and very lovely. Armstrong thought she might be about twenty-six; he also thought that something might be developing between her and Foster. The three always met for sundowners on the porch of her house, which she had equipped with lounging chairs from Nairobi, and with glass-topped tables.

She liked Armstrong. She liked to hear him talk about his years in places like Garissa and faraway Lodwar, posts that were as remote as Galla. She was in harmony with Africa and, because she had a natural understanding of natives, she insisted that there was something

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peculiar behind the way they were now gathering. She also insisted that they would never rush the jail because, although he could muster only a handful of *askaris* and had but one machine gun, Foster would kill hundreds of natives before they could even break his fence. The tribesmen knew it and, Laura argued, they would use much more subtle means to get at the prisoners, if that was what they were after.

Laura wore yellow and, as the level light of the setting sun caught her, she made a picture against the swinging cords and the roughness of the house wall. She held Foster's gaze as she crossed the porch to pour fresh drinks. No one spoke immediately; conversation always tended to be spasmodic over sundowners.

Armstrong watched Laura's hands while she made the drinks. Her fingers were slim, tanned. She did not allow her nails to grow very long, and they were polished a dusty red, almost the color of Kenya clay.

As she passed their glasses she said, "I heard you mention Johnny Craig." Armstrong nodded, and she went on, "I'm curious to meet him, because I've heard all kinds of things about him!" She asked Foster, "Did you say that he was after the German?"

"He might be," the K.A.R. man replied.

Laura sipped her drink and, for a little space, gazed out across the post. Everything had a sun-baked African beauty in the softening light, and she was looking at the columns of smoke in the bush when she asked suddenly, "What happened between Johnny Craig and the German?"

Armstrong looked at Foster. Both drank at the same time, then the commissioner put down his glass and said, "I don't think Johnny likes anyone to know."

THE sun had gone. Even the afterglow had faded out of the sky when Johnny Craig came from the bush, and walked toward the wells at Galla. The well-shafts were rarely more than thirty inches in diameter, and they went straight down through the limestone for as much as eighty feet. They were centuries old, and no one knew who had sunk them, or just how they had been dug.

It was the existence of the Well of God which had made Galla a meeting place for camel tracks running out of Jubaland and up to Abyssinia and across the wastes to faraway Uganda. This well was located by itself, where some bushes grew near a hole which formed the well-mouth, and which was hardly more than a jagged break in the rock. In front of it was a heavy, trough-like mass of hollowed stones.

Seventeen natives were required to get water from the Well of God. Five nude women first climbed down the shaft, which curved under a great belly of rock and then dipped to a pool; twelve men followed, standing on projections, or pieces of wood driven into crevices, passing down skin buckets which the women filled at the pool and handed up again. The man at the top emptied them into the trough.

The well had gained its name because it had never dried up, and because men believed that there was no sweeter water in all the desert. It had, however, failed now.

Armstrong thought this was because the reopened wells had drained away its water; the natives believed it was because he would no longer permit them to make blood sacrifices in the great trough. They regretted this because the water, besides being very pure, was supposed to give fertility to women who were drenched with it, so that they would produce sons. That was why women went to the bottom of the shaft where water, spilled from buckets, soused them continually.

Craig picked his way across the limestone toward the well. He had often drunk here, and he remembered the taste of the water, and he wanted to see for himself that the well was dry.

He found the stone trough still hot from the sun. He bent over the opening of the shaft, but no damp air came up. The bushes were withered where, all year, they once had been green.

His Masai servant padded softly up beside him and Jeko, the six-toed Chuka, bent low over the shaft and shouted into its darkness: *"Ee-yah . . . maji!"* He was calling to the water, but his voice did not echo back as it would have done had there been a pool below.

Jeko said regretfully, "Water finish, *bwana,"*

Karioki said confidently, "It will come again, after the killing, *bwana."* He whispered down the shaft in his own tongue instead of in Swahili, "Run blood . . . run water!" then he moved after Jeko and Craig as they returned to the camel track, which ran past the local native village.

This had grown tremendously since Armstrong had cleared the wells, and its huts formed shadowy groups in the deepening darkness. They were made from crossed sticks and plastered mud, roofed with greased skins and grass thatching. Natives were coming from among them, because they had been watching for Craig's arrival.

All through the bush, Somalis and savage-looking Boran had come out of the darkness to watch him pass. There had also been a few Habash, wearing dirty-white *shammas* and tight trousering, lifting their hands in greeting.

The voices of the men from Galla village now came out of the shadows, *"Jambo, bwana! Jambo!"* and some called, *"Jambo, bwana Kragi."*

Kragi was the best they could make of his name. Often they called him *Kragi mkubwa,* which meant "big Kragi," in the sense of being both big in size and big of heart and big in the way that the natives understood dealings be-

tween men. *Jambo* was the only word they had for greeting, and it was a kind of "hello."

The men spoke respectfully as he went by, and the women smiled, and pot-bellied children stared in awe. He discerned some faces that he knew, and he greeted such men by name, pitching his voice high, just as the natives themselves did when they met and named a friend.

Passing an old woman he called "Ah . . . *jambo*, Miriamo!" She kept chickens in the village and was known to be more powerful than any witch-doctor. She had, in fact, replaced the local witch-doctor, and her fame had spread far.

She said, as Craig went past, "There will be killing, *Kragi mkubwa*."

She was not asking a question. She was telling him that there would be killing. But he knew that for himself, and so did they all.

A little distance further he reached two long buildings placed to face one another. In the open space between them grew a wild fig vine, which had encircled and choked an acacia tree, winding about its trunk and twisting around the dead branches.

Suckers had dropped and rooted, and now the fig tree provided wonderful shade for natives who came to the two buildings, which were traders' stores. One was run by a quiet and contented man from India, named Hussein; the other was owned by Craig. His store had its door boarded up, like every store in the territory across which he had once traded. They had been closed for almost three years.

Beyond the stores, Craig came to the dismantled outer fence. Its posts stood bleakly, all the wire gone from them. The wooden entrance gate remained in position, but there was no sentry on duty as there had been formerly at night. He walked on, into the post.

Patches of smoky light showed at the doorways of the *askari* huts, which had cracked mud walls and thatching reinforced with four-gallon gasoline cans, cut and flattened.

THERE was light beyond the deep, barred windows of the jail. The wire and the posts of the heavy fence here were black against this light, and Craig could see patroling *askari* sentries.

As he went on, he saw the dark bulks of the houses in which Armstrong and Foster lived, and he made for Laura's house, since it was the only one with a light. Jeko and Karioki fell away behind him, stopping before they came within range of the light, which was made by two storm lanterns, hanging on a post set up thirty feet away from the house. The lanterns were clouded by a swirl of insects; because of these insects, it was impossible to have a light inside a house at night.

Jeko lowered his head-load and squatted on his heels, digging his feet into the sand. He did this from habit, hiding his toes. Karioki took off the water bag and laid down his weapons, except the heavy war-spear. This had a short wooden haft and a metal tail-piece that was as long as the blade; thrown from fifty feet, it could split a man. Karioki drove the butt into the sand, so that the shining blade was upright. He squatted beside it, his eyes gleaming as he watched Craig go on toward the porch.

Laura was talking to Armstrong and the K.A.R. captain. They could not see Craig while he approached in the dark. But he could see them, very clearly.

It was current native chatter that a white woman was in Galla, and Craig had expected to find Laura there. Her yellow dress caught the light, and she was very striking against the soft shadows of the porch. He heard her clear voice, and marked how attentively Armstrong and Foster were listening.

She was saying, "I'd rather be in Africa than anywhere else, but I haven't even begun to live the kind of life that I want!"

"And what kind of life is that?" Foster asked.

"It's hard to explain," she answered, then turned to Armstrong. "I'd like to be as much a part of Africa as you are. Living in Africa is like living at the source of things."

Armstrong explained that. "Existence began here," he said quietly.

"There's a kind of strength in the very earth," she commented, and sat up while she was speaking.

Her glance had caught Craig as he came within the light from the lanterns. He looked very big against the spreading blue darkness, and he approached like someone stepping from the heart of Africa itself.

Armstrong and Foster saw him. Both rose quickly. The commissioner called, "Hello, Johnny!"

Craig answered, "Hello there!" and his glance surveyed them while he came on. He stopped a little way from the porch and dust spilled from his helmet when he took it off, in deference to Laura.

Armstrong said, "How are you, Johnny?" and his manner was that of a man personally glad to see Craig, but embarrassed because of what his presence might mean. They shook hands, and Laura noticed scars on Craig's left arm; they showed through the thorn-tattered sleeve, slanting, tapering where the biceps swelled. She noted the strong bridge to his nose, and she liked his frank gaze when he was formally introduced.

He smiled and told her, "I've heard about you from the natives, all the way through the bush!"

He accepted her offer of a drink, then Armstrong said, "I don't think you know Captain Foster."

Foster nodded shortly. "How do you do,

Craig." His tone was not particularly friendly, although he smiled.

"I'd like to make use of your guest hut." Craig's voice was soft, strangely attractive in its slowness. He went on easily, "I'd like to stay a few days, perhaps until the end of the rains, before I go on to the Habash hills."

As he took the glass which Laura was now proffering, Foster asked, "Have you come far?"

Craig answered casually, "I left the Sulki waterhole just before dawn this morning."

"That's over forty miles away!" The K.A.R. man was astonished. Forty miles across the desert was an accomplishment during the dry weather; in the rainy season it was a feat.

Craig had stepped close to Laura when he took the drink, and she caught the smell of the desert about him. He watched her while he half emptied the glass, and she knew that she was going to like him.

Armstrong was peering out into the darkness, trying to see who Craig might have brought with him, when Foster said directly, and very frankly, "Craig, in case you're interested, perhaps I should tell you that the German and the other prisoners here are under military escort."

He smiled while he spoke. Craig smiled as he replied, "I know."

"And my orders are to deliver them to Meru," the K.A.R. man continued.

"I know that, too," Craig answered, and finished his drink before he added, "But I don't think you'll get them there."

Foster glanced toward the commissioner, who asked slowly, "Johnny, have you had anything to do with the way these natives are gathering around here?"

"Nothing at all," Craig replied. "But I know they want to get at the Italians."

"And do you want to get at the German?" Foster asked bluntly.

Craig passed his empty glass to Laura, while he asked Foster slowly, "D'you know what that man did to me?"

Armstrong cut in, "Just a moment!" Then he said, "Kim, we're not being very welcoming to a man just off a safari!" He added, "We can talk things over tomorrow."

Craig said, "I'd prefer to talk things over now."

CRAIG would not sit down. He didn't want to stiffen up after his long day's travel. He leaned against a post at the front of the porch, and it was then that Laura became aware of a curious thing.

Natives were gathering on the sand, just at the edge of the light. They had come from the village and the *askari* huts, and more seemed to be arriving all the time, peering out of the darkness toward the porch.

Craig said, speaking to Foster, "I'd like to tell you about the German prisoner, Richther."

Armstrong asked quietly, sympathetically, "What did he do to you, Johnny? I'd like to know the truth of that."

Craig looked toward Laura. He seemed to be considering whether he should speak in front of her, and she was about to excuse herself, and leave them to talk, when he said abruptly, "Richther took charge of everything, up in the Habash hills. He lived in a big house that the Italians had built at Jiran."

He paused again, then went on, "I was caught up there when they came into the war, and I was the only white prisoner they had. First the Italians tried to make me sign my trading concession over to them, but I wouldn't do it. Then Richther sent for me. He sat at one end of a table and I stood at the other end." Craig asked suddenly, "Have you heard about the table?"

Armstrong shook his head. So did Foster. When Craig glanced toward Laura, she shook her head as well.

"It was a very heavy table," Craig explained. "A magnificent thing! Ten feet long, and almost five feet wide. It had been brought down from the palace of the Negus Negusti at Addis." He explained to Laura, "The palace of the King of Kings."

His voice now had in it the tone of a man who was glad to unburden himself of something which was heavy in his mind. Armstrong watched him, nodding sympathetically, as though he understood this.

"Richther wanted me to tell him about the old mines in the Habash hills." Craig said. "They're not really mines at all. They're simply places where the tribesmen find gold nuggets or rough stones by working the ground a little. It's rich territory up there, and very wild. I didn't know where the mines were, and I wouldn't tell Richther the names of the Habash chiefs who might know."

He went on slowly, "So I was tied to the great table, and I was flogged." He lowered his voice. "He ordered me more than one hundred lashes. When I still wouldn't tell him, Richther had me turned over and I was whipped five times across the belly. Then I thought I would die."

Craig straightened up against the post, gesturing a little as he went on, softly now. "Richther paid a black man to flog me. I was a civilian, and I had no part in the war, and what he wanted to know was not a military matter." He looked at Foster. "So it's a personal thing between myself and the German. And I'd be dead now, except that some of the Habash got me away and carried me almost a thousand miles, because of the roundabout way they had to go. When I was able to walk, I found that I couldn't get into the army because of what Richther had done to me." He went on, after a long tense moment, "Well, he is here, and

I am here, too. But now he is the prisoner."

Foster and Armstrong again exchanged glances. Laura, looking out beyond them, saw that the number of natives on the sand before the porch had greatly increased. It was plain that they had come to look at the *bwana Kragi*.

She heard Foster say, "I can imagine how you feel, Craig, but you'll get nothing out of coming here." He added, "Being revengeful only makes trouble for yourself, and for everyone else."

Craig smiled a little. He said quietly, "I know what you mean. You'd like me to go away, and not be difficult. You're an army man, and I'm only a civilian!"

"What I mean," Foster answered sharply, "is that after I've delivered Richther to Meru, he'll get all that he deserves."

"I beg leave to doubt that!" Craig's exclamation was startlingly quick and loud, and his voice had taken on a sudden hardness.

The K.A.R. man eyed him for a moment. "You've been brooding over this," he said.

"A little perhaps." There was something dangerous in the way Craig replied.

"And you want to remember, my dear fellow," Foster began tolerantly, "the war's ended in this part of the world."

"So is the pain of my flogging, but the marks of it remain, Captain Foster!" Craig's words came explosively, and his voice was almost a shout as he said, "I think I should show you my back, if that's the only way to make you understand!"

He ripped at his shirt, facing onto the porch, turning his back toward the lantern-light. His shirt came away and, at once, Laura heard a sound from the natives out in the darkness, starting as a gasp, and becoming a peculiar moan that arose half from pity and half from horror at the dreadful sight of his back.

Foster looked at Craig's back and his eyes widened, and Laura thought that he lost color. Armstrong moved to look and he whispered, compassionately and low, "Oh, Johnny, my boy. Johnny!"

Laura could see nothing, because Craig was facing her. His lips were tight, as though it hurt him that anyone should see the marks he carried. He met her gaze and spoke softly to her, and he seemed to choose his words with care.

"Since we shall be here together," he whispered and began to turn around, "and because things will happen which you may find it hard to forgive, I think you ought to see what one man can do to another."

As he stopped speaking, he came completely around, and she saw his back. The light was not fully on it, but she could see enough, and she felt a swelling in her throat. Except on his left shoulder, none of the original white skin was left. Everything had been lacerated, cut and torn by the plucking of the whip. From shoulders to waist, his back was all ridges and deep weals and angry colors. Nature had been unable to restore symmetry to the living flesh, because it had been so much distorted. Laura knew that it would be hard even to guess at the agony he had suffered.

He began to slip on his shirt. Armstrong spoke, and he was a shocked man talking to make conversation. "Johnny, did you say you might be here until the end of the rains?"

"Perhaps," Craig answered, and looked at him before he added, "Someone else is coming to Galla, and I want to be here when he arrives."

He walked away then, going toward the little guest hut, while native voices sounded from

She was a young Boran girl, and Ferrara had bought her at Ashebo.

the darkness, calling his name, like friends who were anxious for him to know that they had not forgotten him.

"Bwana Kragi!" they said softly and Laura heard an old man cry out, *"Kragi mkubwa . . . jambo!"*

CHAPTER II

THE HABASH DRUM

THE jail at Galla was a square building which had very thick walls, plastered with mud and lime-washed. It was lit by two storm-lanterns, hung either side of the doorway, and the place had an acrid, ugly, confined odor. Iron grille-work, rising to the timbered roof, split the floor into four cage-like quarters.

One quarter, by the entrance, formed a guard-room for *askaris*. Another quarter contained three of the Italians, one of whom was Ferrara, who had held a minor *residente* post at Ashebo, in the Boran country.

He had been a Fascist official in Genoa, but thought he saw better opportunities in the Abyssinian extension of the Roman empire. He was an artillery captain, and wore some remnants of uniform. He had a long, square-shaped nose and a long jaw. His lower lip was always pulled in, matching the cunning watchfulness of his eyes. His hair was blond, with a foxy tinge.

In subduing the Boran in his district, he had acquired considerable treasure in the form of bags of cumbersome Maria Theresa dollars, silver and gold ornaments, and rough-cut gems conjured from Boran tribesmen by a variety of ill-treatment, cunning and torment, and a good deal of killing. Occasionally, he had commandeered all the livestock and all food supplies in a village, forcing the occupants to ransom themselves or starve. He had discovered that, collectively, natives are surprisingly rich. He had been caught by the British advance into Abyssinia.

His cell companions—Jacomo and Silvani—were also *residentes*, holding military rank, accused of similar activities. Both had been captains in the 3rd Bersaglieri regiment, and each had a pith helmet with a plume of cock-feathers. The feathers were broken and drooping now, matching their untidy colonial uniforms.

In another section of the jail was "Nicky" Bertelli, who'd been *commissario* over the territory ruled by the three *residentes*. He had a colonel's heavy silver edging to his shoulder-straps, the black-and-red collar patches of the Aosta Brigade, a number of campaign ribbons, and the Military Order of Savoy. Before Italy entered the war, he had often flown down to Nairobi, conferring with British officials, putting forward proposals for increasing the trickle of trade between his territory and the northern frontier district of Kenya. He had been welcomed at dinner parties, where no one was aware of the methods that he employed to keep the natives under control.

Bertelli's administration had been very spectacular. Giorgis was not the only chief he had had pushed out of a plane, and there were several who had been tied to posts high off the ground, and left to die in their ropes, providing a visual warning of what happened when Commissario Bertelli was displeased. He had enforced slave labor for roads, devising showy punishment for the recalcitrant. The British had still other charges to bring against the very handsome and personable Italian, but there was enough against him for the time being.

The fourth quarter of the jail was occupied by Hermann Richther. Like Bertelli and the others, the German was in his thirties. He had bushy brows, and wiry hair. His nose was short and quite straight, and his underlip was thin, drawn in like Guido Ferrara's. It was the lip of a watchful, purposeful and ill-disposed man.

He wore no definite uniform, but he had two suitcases of clothes, and was careful to keep himself smart and clean. Also, for an hour every morning, he exercised in his cell, and he repeated this in the evening.

Richther's function had been to advise on the exploitation of conquered territory, but he had interested himself primarily in trying to discover information about the mines in the Habash hills. His treatment of Johnny Craig had been typical and all his activities had been

ruthless, because of the apparent impossibility of his ever being called to account. Information about him was still coming in, all of it bad.

He was at his evening exercises when Armstrong walked into the jail to assure himself that all was in order; he always made his inspection as soon as he could after dark. Richther was stripped to the waist, barefooted. He had his legs hooked through the door-bars of his cage and was throwing his body backward, straining down with his hands to touch the floor and pulling himself up again. He was lean and very strong, hard-muscled.

He paid no attention to Armstrong. The Italians came to attention, as did the *askaris* who formed the guard, and Bertelli called, "Good evening, Commissioner!" Armstrong did not reply. He was staring at a native girl, startled to see her in the guard-room, until he recognized her as Ferrara's woman.

She was young and had a length of striped silk across her shoulders, draped like a cape. The front hung open and, as she turned to face Armstrong, he saw that her slender figure was bare above the waist, except for a mass of necklaces formed from colored beads and silver coins.

She was a Boran girl, and Ferrara had bought her at Ashebo. She had arrived at Galla the day before, bringing gifts and food for him. Foster had refused to let her give the prisoner anything; he had at first refused even to let her speak with him, but she had traveled so far that he had finally relented.

Her necklaces and bangles denoted wealth. She wore a tight silken headdress which fell back over her shoulders and was intended to indicate that she was a married woman. Married, that is, to Ferrara. It puzzled Armstrong that she should have followed the Italian; such faithfulness was unusual, and he wondered what was behind it. She sidled out through the doorway, and the picket who had been standing over her walked with her toward a gate, seeing to it that she went straight outside.

Armstrong's own police *askaris* were on duty; they had relieved Foster's K.A.R. men when the guard had been changed at sundown. They looked smart in their blue shorts and blue sweaters. They had old-fashioned webbing equipment, with Lee-Enfield rifles, but neither they nor the K.A.R. native soldiers were given ammunition. That was issued only when an emergency arose.

ARMSTRONG moved to the cage which held Ferrara and his companions. They stared at him sourly. The men had paillasses, rolled against one wall with blankets folded above them. There was little else, because these men had few possessions.

The cell had neither bolt nor lock. The gate was secured by a steel slat, pivoted at one end and running across the bars, dropping into a slot and held by a steel pin. The slat was long, and the pin was placed beyond all possible reach of the occupants of the cage. This was safe enough, because the prisoners were watched night and day.

Armstrong tried the slat and its pin, then went to look at Bertelli. The *commissario* had black hair and black eyes and a pale, challenging face. To occupy himself, he had scratched a floral design about the window in the mud wall behind him. This opening was almost three feet deep, and bars crossed it.

Actually, bars ran all the way up inside the mud walls and over the ceiling, so that each cell was a complete cage. Richther had found this out when, on his first night in Galla, he had surreptitiously clawed and scratched in one corner, pulling away dried mud and bits of woodwork, believing that he could break through to the open. He had come upon massive, inch-thick bars, and Foster had made him spend the next day repairing the damage.

The German was still exercising himself when Armstrong turned to inspect his cell and, at that moment, Foster stepped through the jail doorway. He usually accompanied Armstrong, and he had been inspecting the sentries outside.

The Italian prisoners grew rigid when they saw him. He stepped sharply toward Richther's cage, lifting a piece of rhino hide, tapered to form a switch. He brought this down across the German's legs, where they jutted through the door-bars.

"Damn your insolence, Richther! Come to attention in the presence of the *commissioner!*"

Richther loosened his leg-grip, flicked his feet inwards and turned a half-somersault, landing neatly upright.

"Come to attention!" Foster repeated.

In his own good time, Richther put his feet together and stood with his hands at his sides. He was not afraid of Foster, because there were bars between them.

"If the commissioner comes in here again and you ignore him, I'll stop your food for the following day," Foster warned him coldly.

It was, he had found, possible to discipline Richther only by cutting his rations. Foster knew perfectly well that the German was alert for the least chance of escape, and kept himself fit in order to be able to make the most of that opportunity when it should come. He needed food to maintain his strength.

Richther glowered from behind his bars, lips compressed, while Foster glanced about the jail at the filled water-bags and swept flooring, then moved outside with Armstrong. To show the Italians that he could not be intimidated, Richther immediately slipped his legs through the door-bars, continuing with his exercises.

Walking away with Armstrong, Foster slashed the air with his switch and said, "I used this

on Richther just now, partly because I'd been thinking about Johnny Craig's back."

"I wish Johnny were somewhere else," Armstrong said. "I like him and you will, too, if ever you come to know him. But Johnny can be dangerous!"

He came to a stop. Both looked out through the barbwire of the fence to where a light now showed in the guest hut.

"He's been among natives so long that he thinks as they do. And they think on a slant, as it were. That's what makes them so unexpected," Armstrong went on. "Johnny's here for something, and he wasn't talking idly when he said you'd never get your prisoners down to Meru!"

Foster looked at the commissioner. "Combining your police *askaris* with mine, I can muster twenty-five men, and I have a machine gun," he said. "It is alarming to be surrounded by all these wogs but, when you come right down to it, what can they do?"

"Anywhere else, I'd say they couldn't do anything," Armstrong replied. "But here—" He let his words trail off to noncommittal silence.

They moved on a little way, then stopped abruptly. Out of the darkness came a sound which Armstrong had not heard for many years. Someone was rapping at a drum, and it was not a local *ingoma* drum, used for dances. Armstrong could tell from its peculiarly resonant note that it was a long drum, with a stretched skin at either end.

"It's a Habash drum," he said. "It's probably talking to tribesmen coming down from the hills."

The drum's pattern of sound lasted a quarter-minute, silenced for a similar length of time, then the same succession of rolls and staccato thuds was repeated.

"What's it saying?" Foster asked.

Armstrong said, "I don't know, but it could be telling them that Johnny Craig is here."

They stood listening, trying to determine where the drum was hidden, but the sound seemed to come from no definite point in the blackness of the bush and, after ten minutes, it stopped altogether.

JOHNNY CRAIG'S two servants had lit a cooking-fire behind the small guest hut, and were preparing a meal for him. The hut had not been lime-washed, and it was entirely bare except for a small iron cot with a piece of canvas laced across the frame. A lantern hung on a post outside the doorway.

Craig had sponge-bathed, using water from a huge gourd. Instead of shoes, he now wore a pair of native sandals, each retained by a toe-thong. Jeko had produced a clean untorn shirt out of the head-load.

Waiting for his meal, Craig sat on the cot and occupied himself with a long, tapering piece of hide, trimming and scraping it. All the while, he listened for some response to the drum which had been sounding in the bush. Jeko and Karioki were also listening and he called to them, asking if they could hear a reply.

"No, *bwana*," Jeko answered, and the man added quietly, "The *memsahib* is coming!"

There was only one *memsahib* in Galla, and Craig jerked off the cot, looking out through the air-space between the hut wall and the roof. He saw Laura just entering the light of the lantern.

She called *"Hodi!"* which was the native way of letting the occupant of a hut know that someone was outside. Johnny Craig answered *"Karibu!"* and moved to the doorway.

She paused when she saw him, the warm lantern-light on her face, as she said, "I wondered if you'd like to come over to my house for dinner this evening."

"I would, very much, but an old woman sent me two chickens from the village," he answered. "My boys are baking them now."

"Chickens are luxuries. If you like, we could wait and take them across to my house," she suggested, "because all I have to offer you is goat meat!"

He laughed with her, nodding, then moved aside as she looked into the hut. "This is rather bare, isn't it?" she asked.

He did not answer. She discovered that he was looking at her in a way which reflected something of the flattering manner natives often had when they watched her, as though they found it hard to believe that she was real. Many of them had never seen a white woman before, and to these Laura was a very beautiful phenomenon.

She could tell, from Johnny Craig's attitude now and from what she had heard of him, that he had not had much to do with women. The little that she knew about him was that he had been privately educated in Nairobi, and it was now seven or eight years since his parents had been killed on the edge of Meru forest. A charging rhinoceros had overturned their car along the Nanyuki road, almost exactly on the equator, and had attacked the wreckage again and again. Craig had hunted the rhino down and then, left completely to his own devices, he had begun trading. He had a knack and a liking for it, and he would travel deep into terrain to which no Arab or East Indian trader would go. He had often made old-style safaris, using scores of bearers over great distances, and he had been successful because the natives sensed something basically honest about him.

Laura found herself curious concerning him, and compassionate because of his scars. She wanted to make him talk, so she sat on the edge of the cot and nodded toward the strip of hide, and asked, "What's that?"

The hide was nine feet long. One end was

rounded, thick. The other end was almost as thin as a shoelace. When Craig gripped the thicker end, Laura saw at once what it was and it startled her. She exclaimed, "You're making a whip!"

"I remember exactly what the other one was like," he told her quietly, and let the unfinished hide run through his hands. "A man could just close his fist around the butt, and the tip of the lash was half the thickness of my little finger."

He was making a duplicate of the whip with which he had been flogged, and she stared aghast at the cruel weight and size of it. He jerked on the butt and the lash flicked, making an ugly, slapping sound which reminded her of his tortured back.

She asked, sharply, "Are you making that to use on Richther?"

"I'm simply making it." His tone indicated, very positively, that he did not want to talk about it, but he smiled as he put aside the knife that he had been using and began to coil the lash. After a moment, he asked, "Did you hear that drum? It was talking to a man who's over two hundred miles away."

"The 'someone else' you said was coming to Galla?" He nodded, and she asked, "Who is he?"

"He's a Habash chief named Mbogo, and his name means 'black buffalo'," Craig said readily and, because his quiet voice was so expressive, she knew that he was speaking of someone he liked. He added, "He's very courageous, and very strong. And very much a gentleman, if you can believe that."

She did believe it. She had met natives who were naturally courteous.

Craig went on, "He has even more reason than I to want to get at Richther!" He glanced at her as he said, "I don't suppose you've ever heard of Mbogo, but he lived in one of the largest villages in the Habash hills."

Craig put the coiled whip aside, and leaned against the wall, in the shadow, while he explained, "When no one in the village would tell Richther about the mines, his native irregulars massacred all the young men. Then Mbogo was tied to the center pole of his hut, and the whole village was set afire. When the fire reached Mbogo, he flailed about and broke the pole and the burning roof fell in, but he managed to get out of the hut. He's a very big man, and very strong."

Craig eased himself off the wall and moved to the doorway, looking out into the darkness, speaking half over his shoulder.

"Mbogo has a dwarfed cousin, a cripple. He's called Kadago, because he's so little, and those two have always loved one another. Somehow, he got to Mbogo and helped him out of the burning village. The smoke hid them, I expect." Craig looked at Laura across the dimly lit hut. "And now, wherever he goes, Mbogo carries the little man on his shoulders. The chief's eyes were put out by the burning thatch, and the dwarf guides him about."

Laura said softly, "And I suppose, like you, he's now looking for revenge."

"There's more in it than revenge," Craig explained slowly. "The men in that jail outraged native life up here, and the tribesmen believe they should be punished according to native laws."

"That would be all right," Laura said, "if they could get at them!"

"They will get at them," he assured her, and looked toward the darkness of the bush.

She moved up beside him. There was nothing to see. Everything merged with the deep blueness of the night, but she thought of the natives who were hidden in the darkness, completely surrounding the post. For the first time, she felt afraid of them.

Johnny Craig said slowly, "Every native in Africa will come to know what happens here. It'll be a legend." There was a very odd note in his voice as he added, "I'll tell you something." When he went on, his tone was low-pitched. "The tribesmen are saying that when the sun goes down tomorrow, there will be only four prisoners left in the jail."

"They'll have taken one out?" she asked, and he nodded.

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She looked toward the thick-walled jail. Beyond the mass of stakes and barbed wire, she saw sentries moving, bayonets glistening in the moonlight.

"I don't see how they can even get near them!" Laura exclaimed.

"Neither do I. But they will."

She asked, "Who will they take?" but he could not even guess at that.

"What'll they do to him?"

"You'll hear when they kill him," Johnny Craig answered.

CHAPTER III

ESCAPE AT SUNDOWN

AT DAWN the next day, an *askari* bugler sounded the "Turkish Rise." This reveille roused the post and brought the adjacent village to life. Camels were on their way to the wells before the sun was strong enough to throw real shadows, and by that time Richther

The Boran girl ran wildly toward the bush, slim brown legs gleaming, her striped wrap-around flying.

was being put back in his cell, his hour of exercise completed.

Bertelli and the vain, blond-haired Ferrara were then allowed out of the building. The idea of exercising them early in the morning was so they should be seen by as few natives as possible but, before dawn, numbers of tribesmen always slipped into the post, coming to look at the prisoners.

Some now lay, still and quiet, flattened near the barbed wire; their garments, grimed from travel, had the same hue as the sand. These were all lean, light-weight Boran who, as a tribe, showed the effects of generations of hard living. They were bony from undernourishment, tenaciously possessive of the things they owned, and very vengeful. Handsome Somalis, who had come out of Jubaland, stood by the entrance gates at either end of the little compound, and many were staring openly through the fence. Some aloof Habash gazed at the jail from a little way off, near the roofing under which stood the K.A.R. truck that had brought the prisoners down.

The Habash were quiet, intense men, with kinky hair and high foreheads, weathered faces and clean-cut lips; although they had extremely black skins, they were not negroid. A few wore white trousering, and all were wrapped in *shammas*—body-cloths—stained from travel. Most of them were armed with short, curved swords and knives. A few had silver-studded cartridge belts or bandoleers, but none carried guns; they had left these on their own side of the Abyssinian border.

The silent natives watched Bertelli walk briskly around the inside of the fence. Ferrara, however, sat on a bench outside the jail, his head in his hands. His attitude was that of a sick man and, presently, he went to a *chagul* and drank a little water. Soon afterwards, he moved toward the fence, retching, trying to vomit.

Sergeant Makala, in charge of the guard, went over to peer at the man. Makala was big, with tribal scars fanning from each cheekbone. His earlobes had been enormously distended by wooden disks. For tidiness now, since he was not permitted to wear disks, the huge lobes were twisted and looped over the tops of his ears.

The Italian doubled up, folding his arms across his abdomen as he returned to the bench, stumbling a little, Makala aiding him.

The Somalis stared from outside the fence. The Habash became very still. The Boran men raised their heads from the sand to gaze curiously, as they might have watched an animal.

Presently, a slim figure came across the sand from the direction of the wells. It was the Boran girl whom Ferrara had bought, and she had discarded almost all her jewelry of the evening before. She had only a cloth wrapped about her waist, with a colored *shamma* across her shoulders, pulled closely against the morning's chilly air. She paused short of the fence, peering toward Ferrara.

Sergeant Makala left him, called some men and, going outside the fence, began to drive away the watching tribesmen. This had to be done every morning. The only one not to leave was the Boran girl. She sat on the sand in the shade by the K.A.R. truck, watching Ferrara all the while.

When Sergeant Makala had driven the natives beyond the post boundaries, he made for Foster's house, stamping onto the porch, his rifle-butt thudding against the hard mud floor as he came to attention. Foster was shaving.

The sergeant called, "One Italiani belly-sick, *bwana*." The K.A.R. man glanced and nodded briefly. The sergeant shouldered his rifle and marched back.

Foster continued shaving, not hurrying. His house had been constructed against the time when a garrison of the King's African Rifles might be stationed at Galla, when the building would accommodate the officer in charge. There was, as yet, no garrison, and Foster was the first to use the house, and it was furnished only with those things for which Armstrong had no use.

The table and two chairs were very old, much repaired with cow-sinews, bamboo and strips of brown goat-skin. There was a water filter, and a folding cot with a mosquito net draping above it. Foster had a couple of bags, and his spare uniforms hung neatly against the wall, near a shot-gun for guinea fowl, and an express rifle.

The thick, lime-washed walls helped to keep the place cool and the heavy thatch, drooping to low eaves, formed insulation against the worst of the sun's direct heat.

Foster finished shaving and dressed, picked up his rhino-hide switch, then stepped out into the now bright sunshine. He was in time to see Laura emerge from her house, heading for an improvised cabaña, where she would take her brief morning sunbath. He called a greeting and she waved in reply, pulling her white robe closer as she walked on. The movement stressed the slim beauty of her figure.

Foster turned toward Armstrong's house. On the way, he saw Ferrara sitting on the bench outside the jail, and he saw the Boran girl in the shadow by the grimy K.A.R. truck.

ARMSTRONG was on his porch, drinking his second cup of morning tea. He wore old, gray flannel slacks and shoes, and a khaki shirt. Armstrong usually went to his office at this time, to determine which native cases he would consider during the morning. After that, he breakfasted comfortably. Often, if the cases were small and of no particular importance, he sat on his porch and administered justice from the breakfast table.

Until recently, Armstrong had always made a safari during the rainy season, calling at the villages in his district, collecting taxes, judging cases as he came to them. This was not possible under existing circumstances and, in any case, with each succeeding season he felt a little less like enduring the discomforts of a long bush journey.

He drained his cup while Foster told him about the Italian, then the K.A.R. man asked, "I wonder if that girl gave him something last night?" He added, "I took away the food and stuff she'd brought, and I had an *askari's* woman search her. It seemed safe to let her in." Then he said, "Look at the way she's watching him!"

Armstrong peered toward the Boran girl, and he eyed her again as he walked over to the jail, while Foster observed thoughtfully, "It's surprising that the Boran people haven't killed her long ago, since they hate Ferrara, and she's his native wife."

"These wogs go about things in a funny way," Armstrong replied. "Perhaps they've saved her to make her poison him now," but he did not actually believe that.

A sentry opened one of the gates, and Bertelli came to attention when they approached the jail building. He had shaved, and he looked fresh and clean, in spite of his shabby uniform. He called, "Good morning, gentlemen!"

"What's the matter with Ferrara?" Armstrong asked, but Bertelli did not know.

Although Ferrara saw them coming, he made no attempt to get to his feet. He remained with his forearms pressed across his stomach, moaning a little to himself. Foster stepped close and prodded him. "Get up!" he ordered grimly, because he had absolutely no sympathy with this Italian. The man might be sick, but his suffering could be nothing compared with the affliction that he had brought to others.

Ferrara rose slowly. He was sweating and his blond hair was damp. Armstrong spread open the man's eyelids, examining the eyeballs. There was no sign of jaundice. He had no particular pallor about the nostrils or mouth.

Armstrong questioned him through Bertelli, who said, "He feels badly and, all the time, he wants to be sick." Ferrara swore that he had eaten nothing except food served by the jail guard. He said that the Boran girl had touched his hand in greeting, through the bars, but no more than that had passed between them. He seemed anxious to protect the girl, and pointed out that an *askari* had stood by them all the time, while Armstrong himself had come into the jail after she had been there only a minute or two.

He asked permission to remain out in the open, rather than be locked back in his cage, after the exercise period. Foster refused that request, and told Armstrong, "I don't feel inclined to show kindness to any of these men. Besides, they're as artful as a wagon-load of monkeys, and this sly devil may be trying to wangle something." He added, "I think I'll have a word with that Boran girl!"

He started toward one of the gates, but the native girl gave him no opportunity to speak to her. When she saw him approaching, she began to back away. When he called to her, she ran wildly toward the bush, slim brown legs gleaming, her striped wrap-around flying.

Foster shouted toward the *askari* huts and two of his men ran out, grinning. He told them to chase the girl, and bring her in. They set off with a rush, but she gained the thornbush well in front of them. The men continued to run hard and they were out of sight of the post, closing in on her, when a number of Boran tribesmen appeared, blocking their way. The girl ran around them and out of sight, and the two *askaris* pulled up.

The Boran carried heavy-bladed fighting spears and they smiled at the uniformed men, but their smiles were not friendly. The pair smiled nervously in response. For perhaps a minute no one moved, and nothing was said. Then the *askaris* exchanged glances and retraced their steps until they reached a place where jagged limestone threw shade into a little gully. They sat down here, and when an hour had passed they returned to the post, reporting simply that they had pursued the Boran girl but had been unable to catch her.

Foster assumed that they had lost sight of her. The men made no attempt to explain what had actually occurred because they knew that, if they did so, Foster would take an armed squad into the bush, to find and confront the Boran tribesmen and get the girl. That might start trouble.

Nobody around Galla wanted trouble just then. They all knew that the tribesmen in the bush were saying that one of the prisoners would be missing from the jail at sundown, and would die in the darkness.

Both the local natives, and the *askaris* themselves, were very curious to see how this would be done.

OUTSIDE Johnny Craig's hut there was a dead tree-trunk, bleached bone gray. He sat here, trimming his whip, watching the bush and the jail while the sun dropped in the west.

It was time for the guard to be changed, and khaki-clad K.A.R. *askaris* were being marched into the enclosure, preparatory to taking over from the blue-uniformed Kenya police.

Ferrara was sprawled on the bench in the shade of the jail, occasionally retching, not moving very much. Foster had relented during the day and had allowed him to sit outside the building, because of the heat inside.

Armstrong and Foster were standing in front

of the commissioner's office, and both were troubled about Ferrara's condition. They were, also, well aware of the native chatter which said that the jail would be a prisoner short by sundown. Armstrong knew, from experience, that native chatter always had some sound basis. Sometimes, the chatter became garbled and distorted but it could, on the other hand, be startlingly accurate. The commissioner felt that Ferrara might die, and then the jail certainly would be a prisoner short.

"I think we should wireless his symptoms to the doctor at Meru," Armstrong said, "and see what he suggests."

Foster nodded. "We'll do it immediately after guard-mounting."

Usually, at this hour, the two were drinking Scotch on Laura's porch. She sat waiting for them to join her.

She had put on a dress that was almost orange and, in the evening sun, this seemed to flame, making her appear singularly colorful against the white mud wall and the brown thatch.

She could see that a number of natives had come from the village. Some of them always turned out to watch the changing of the guard, but there was a much larger crowd than usual. She could also see other natives in the bush, gazing toward the jail, remaining half hidden. The more she scanned the bush, the more of these groups she distinguished.

She noticed that the villagers remained some distance from the jail fence, instead of crowding as closely as they dared, chattering. This evening they were very still, quiet, adding to her own sense of tension.

She wanted to talk to someone. She was glad when Craig draped the long whip over the tree-trunk, and came toward her. He wore khaki slacks and he had a faded red shirt which, Laura felt, made him look at one with his surroundings.

He smiled as he came to the porch, and his glance was very complimentary. He paused by her, pointing past the jail toward the bush as he exclaimed softly, "Look over there!"

The Boran girl was coming into view from one of the craggy little canyons in the limestone at the edge of the wells. It seemed as though she had walked along the canyon in order to be as close as possible to the post before she showed herself. She was dressed and bejeweled as she had been the evening before, except that there was no cloth about her shoulders.

She paused, making a small and lovely figure against the skyline standing where she could see Ferrara.

The old guard had now formed up outside the jailhouse, and the new guard was in position. Sentries stood rigidly at attention inside the closed gates. Two *askaris* were ready to bring the flag down its staff, and a bugler was waiting for six o'clock before he sounded retreat.

Ferrara stirred and, steadying himself against the jail wall, moved to a rear corner of the building. His strained coughing and retching came through the quiet, then he leaned against the wall, his limp attitude showing weakness and exhaustion after a long day.

The signaler on duty in the radio hut appeared. He had checked the time with the radio station at Meru, and now he stepped smartly into the open, saluting Foster, calling, "*Bwana*, six o'clock!"

Instantly, Sergeant Makala bawled, "Old guard present . . . arms!" and the K.A.R. sergeant responded, "New guard, present . . . arms!" Then the bugler was sounding the first notes of "Retreat," and the flag began slowly to come down.

At the bugle call, even the natives from the village stiffened to attention. Ferrara turned to look out through the barbed wire fence to where the Boran girl was standing, slim and alone. He glanced from her to Foster and Armstrong, at the other side of the compound.

For a little space, the Italian remained standing there, sickly and drooping, then he suddenly came to life and whirled around, leaping for a window-space in the side of the little jail, all his weakness vanishing.

He jumped into the embrasure and reached to grip the inches-high parapet which edged the flat roof of the building, hauling himself upward and swinging his legs so that, in almost one movement, he was pitching full length over the parapet.

He moved with precision, and with such speed that his every step had obviously been clearly calculated. On the roof, he came upright, ran desperately down its length, then hurled himself forward in a wild leap, outward and over the jail fence.

He had figured that, by taking a running jump from the height of the jail roof, a man might clear the tall stakes and the tangle of barbed wire. He missed the wire by inches and kicked his legs forward just before he hit the sand, slid a little way, twisting, then scrambled to his feet, and raced toward the waiting Boran girl. She turned as he came, darting away into the bush, leading him forward.

Inside the fence, the first man to move was the sentry on the jail doorway. Since he had no ammunition, he threw his rifle at Ferrara while the Italian was in mid-air, missing him.

Foster shouted to the gate sentries and they charged out after the escaping man. Foster himself followed, yelling orders to his K.A.R. *askaris*, who broke rank and chased after him.

Ferrara was running across open sand then, jumping from side to side in the expectation of rifle shots, following the Boran girl, who was now vanishing into the bush.

One of the gate sentries dropped his rifle,

giving all his energy to covering the ground, but he could not sprint like a white man and the Italian drew away.

Foster came very fast from the compound, outdistancing his men, but he was too far back to use his revolver effectively. He fired three times, but the bullet went wide, and the explosions only spurred the man on.

Armstrong ordered Sergeant Makala to keep every police *askari* at the alert, then watched the Italian plunge into the thornbush. He remained visible for a few moments, running hard. The *askaris* followed him into the bush, with Foster drawing well ahead. Soon, they all disappeared, and there was nothing to see except a thin haze of dust.

Armstrong looked toward the jail. Sergeant Makala had doubled the sentries on the gates, and he was placing the rest of the police on guard around the jail building. Armstrong saw, also, that the sun had just dipped below the horizon; its rays were slanting up and under a distant mass of rain-clouds, tinting them ruddily.

The sun was down, the jail was a prisoner short, native chatter had been uncannily right, and the commissioner suddenly felt the need of a drink.

He turned toward Laura's porch. She guessed his need and poured Scotch while he was still on his way. He drank it almost neat, then, still holding the empty glass, looked at Johnny Craig.

The big fellow was gazing out at the bush, watching how the rising dust was spread. If Ferrara were being overtaken there would have been a high puff of dust coming from one place, made by a concentration of running men.

"They aren't going to catch him, are they, Johnny?" Armstrong asked.

Craig shook his head.

"Do you think he'll get away?" Laura asked him.

Craig looked at her and smiled, and slowly shook his head again.

CHAPTER IV

THE WELL OF GOD

EVERYTHING about the post was unnaturally still. It was an hour since Ferrara had made his break to escape. The last trace of afterglow had gone from the sky, and the stars were very brilliant.

Armstrong stood on Laura's porch, restless. Laura sat near him, and Craig was lounging in one of the long chairs. A single lamp hung on the post outside.

Armstrong said suddenly, "He'd worked out every move, and he obviously wasn't ill. That was just a trick to get out of his cell."

Laura said nothing. She was listening, because she could not forget what Craig said the evening before: *You'll hear when they kill him.*

Foster came out of the darkness. His shirt was soaked from perspiration. He stumbled for he was tired from running, but there was no sign of fatigue in his voice, only blazing anger.

"He got away," he said. "I was never near enough for a real shot at him." He pitched his sun helmet aside, and Laura gave him a drink. "We simply lost all trace of him!"

"The girl must have put him up to it," Armstrong said, "but she can't hope to get him through the tribesmen. They'll have speared him at sight, unless she's hidden him!" He looked at the K.A.R. man, and said suddenly, "The limestone where they ran is full of little gullies and holes!"

Foster asked slowly, "I wonder if that's where he is? I left all my fellows in the bush, still looking for him. Let's take what men we can, and search the rocks by the wells!"

He gulped the rest of his drink, and the commissioner followed when he raced away. Each man went first to his own house, reappearing with a flashlight, then both ran toward the *askari* huts.

Laura remained gazing after them, and everything became quiet again until she heard Craig's chair creaking. He was slowly easing to his feet. Beyond him, his two servants had appeared from the darkness. She watched them sidle up to the porch, standing within the light and gazing out toward the wells, their faces tense and expectant.

They seemed to be afraid, wanting to be near Craig. Jeko forgot to wiggle his feet in the sand to hide his toes, and Karioki was so tense that thick muscles stood out at the sides of his neck.

Laura came to her feet and, impelled by a fear which made her heartbeat quick, moved near to Craig. She realized that she was seeking his protection just as the two natives had done.

When she was near them, she saw how rigidly they stood. She heard Craig's breathing, shallow, fast.

Foster's voice sounded over by the *askari* huts, but his words were dulled in the absolute silence which had fallen on the night. When the K.A.R. man stopped shouting, there was no other sound whatever, either human or animal.

Laura edged closer and whispered thinly, "What is it?"

"Something's going on by the Well of God," Craig replied.

"D'you mean you can see?" She strained her gaze into the darkness.

"No," he answered, "but there are tribesmen over that way, doing something. I believe they've got Ferrara there."

Jeko raised an arm, pointing in a peculiar

manner, dabbing at the air with his middle finger. His voice came hoarsely, constricted, *"Italiani quisha."*

Craig told Laura softly, "They're going to kill him now." She felt her whole body tighten as he added, "That Boran girl lured him out of the jail for them."

Standing in the unnatural silence, Laura could almost sense the last, brief moments of Ferrara's life slipping away. She was held by a fascinated horror, aware of no shred of pity for him.

The quiet lasted a little longer, then she heard them kill him.

Out of the darkness of the wells came a voice, and she knew that it was Ferrara's, even though she had never heard him speak. It sounded in a thin shriek that was a death-cry, starting high and rising still higher before it faded. It came a second time, full of fear and agony, and on this it died to silence, a most ominous kind of silence.

Jeko and Karioki both leaped forward and Craig started away with them. "Don't come!" he called to Laura.

She paused, but only because she could not run in the shoes that she wore. She darted back into the house, kicking off her shoes and slipping her feet into soft-topped mosquito boots. While she did this, she heard noises breaking on the night, like pent sounds now abruptly released. Natives shouted in the village, and by the wells.

Laura hitched her skirt high, and started to race after Craig. Going past the jail, she saw the police guard gazing through the fence and, by a light within the building, she saw the faces of Jacomo and Silvani, staring from a window-space, pale.

Natives were streaming from the village when she reached the camel track which ran beside the wells, and all of them were making for the dry Well of God. A great crowd had gathered, and she managed to follow Craig through it.

She saw the withered bushes which grew by the opening to the well, and noticed that the natives made no attempt to approach this very closely. No Boran or Habash or Somalis from the bush were visible. The only people were those from the village.

Foster and Armstrong were already there. Their flashlights flicked on as Craig joined them, the beams sliding across the great stone trough by the mouth of the strange well.

Ferrara lay in the trough. He had been killed by the quick thrusts of many native spears.

Local natives said afterwards that a thousand spears had killed him. It was not as many as that, but a great number of men had bloodied their weapons in Ferrara's body.

The flashlights went out and the whispering natives became silent as, from somewhere in the bush, came the sound of the Habash drum which had talked before. It throbbed to attract attention, there was a pause, and then came a single thud. The call was repeated again and again obviously telling, on its last note, that one prisoner had died.

While the drum was being beaten, old Miriamo stepped from among the black figures in the gloom. The witch-woman whispered to Craig, gesturing toward the bloodied figure in the trough.

Foster asked Craig sharply, "What's she saying?"

"She says now that there has been a sacrifice, water will flow in the Well of God again," Craig replied.

(To be Concluded)

PORT O' DANGER

By

KENNETH PERKINS

ILLUSTRATED BY FRANK KRAMER

BEFORE going ashore from the freighter Henry Starr shaved. He pipe-clayed his shoes, got his whites from the insect-proof garment bag and his new Panama from its box. Dressed and immaculate, he stepped to the main pier of Porto Risco. A thousand miles up the Amazon, this place was on the map again because of the rubber boom.

Starr felt grand, but without any grandeur delusion. His mission was of the greatest importance, for the man he was going to see owned Hevea jungles that could have covered twice the area of Connecticut. That would produce a lot of rubber—but there was a serious complication. It was wild rubber.

Following the Indian boy who carried his suitcase, Henry Starr looked very dapper except for the old basket slung over his arm. He should have had the boy carry it, too, for it was bulky and anything but stylish, stuffed with sticks wrapped in muslin and half buried in sawdust. A customs official approached him.

This official was also the *capitão do porto,* a very courteous man with an almost black pug-dog face and pince-nez on a ribbon. He asked the routine questions, writing down the answers—Henry Barton Starr, age twenty-eight—business, rubber technician—home, Troy, New York.

The official squinted over his glasses. "New York! Then you are a Yankee—I mean to say a Northerner?"

"We are all Yankees now, North and South, only they call us Yanks," Starr corrected.

"We have many nationalities here." The officer nodded to the *praça* with its flowers and trees, its adobe church, its red and pink houses on all four sides. "We have Indians, Creoles, French, Caboclos who are half Portuguese—but a gentleman from New York is rare here." He asked abruptly, "You have no fire-arms?"

"In my suitcase, yes, a pistol."

"I am sorry, *senhor,* but it must be left with me." When Starr surrendered it genially, the port officer looked down at the basket. "And

One of the Indios—a blacksmith—doused Starr's shoes and the smell of burnt rubber soles came to him.

what, may I ask, is this matter down here?"

"Some buddings from mother trees to improve your rubber. They sent me from the experimental laboratory at Belem to show how this district can produce three or four times as much rubber from its Hevea forests."

"Bravo!" the official exclaimed. "We are all fervently enthused about rubber here. We must have more! Rubber for cannon mountings, for ailerons and half-tracks and oxygen cylinders and pontoons. You will find yourself a sort of hero in this port. *Felicidade* in your work!"

"But the point you made about Yankees," Starr said, puzzled. "It had something to do with your taking my gun?"

"Oh no, no, no! My apologies. There is a false notion that Yankees like to fight when they travel in strange ports. On the contrary, they are the most amiable travelers in the world, quick to make friends, slow to anger, good-humored, cordial. And I can see that you are the average. A young North American with a big job to do. *Até amanha, amigo!*"

But he kept the gun.

This official, Starr thought as he started shoreward from the pier, was quite a diplomat. He said things that produced an expansive, amiable feeling while he meant, perhaps, just the opposite. At any rate, whatever he meant by his speech of welcome, he had spoken the truth. Starr was certainly not looking for any fight. He felt in tune with the world.

He inhaled the exciting scents of the jungle as he walked up the main street. Here was balm! The squeak of oxcarts, the song of birds, the jingle of bells on the hames of the mules—all music thrilling his bones just as did the rhythm of marimbas in the saloons. The blue and pink houses and the giant orchids were as thrilling to his sight. The brightest point, however, was not color but jet and ivory-white and winking diamonds: this was a woman with a black lace shawl and onyx ear rings and many bracelets on her wrists. She was not young enough to be called a girl—a woman in her thirties, perhaps—but bewitching as she rode by in the open car.

Wagons and *diligências* drew to one side of the street as if a fire engine were coming. Indios, metizzas, candy vendors, shoppers—all stopped to watch her.

She was looking straight down at Starr as if measuring him from the top of his Panama, the full length of his slim body down to his immaculate shoes. She gave him a look of recognition, not a smile by any means, but a sort of nod, half to herself. She even turned back as they passed, and then told her driver to stop.

Starr was so impressed that he scarcely realized what had happened. He had stepped too far out in the street and the car had swerved toward him, perhaps to avoid a chicken. And in swerving it seemed to pick up speed, skidding a little in a pool of reddish mud. If the driver had calculated the effect ahead of time he could not have aimed a more perfect splash. Starr's immaculate suit of white drill, his shoes, his Panama were ruined.

But that did not matter for the moment. He stood gulping as the car stopped and the jeweled lady turned to look at him.

It was the driver who spoke first, over the laughs of the crowd. "Yes? You were going to say something?"

Starr said nothing. He kept gulping and wiping the blobs of mud down his white drill.

"Whose fault do you think it was?" the driver went on. "You standing out in the middle of the street."

The lady in the back seat hushed him, then said to Starr, "A regrettable thing, *senhor*. He is a very careless driver—my *motorista*. I will punish him. And I apologize for him."

"No, don't mention it. My fault entirely."

He said it with a good-natured grin. It must have been his own fault, he had to admit to himself. Besides, the woman was lovely—she looked like the daughter or wife of a grandee. It was almost worth getting spattered just to have her stop her car and talk to him!

Of course it was rather embarrassing, for he had dressed to present himself to one of the richest rubber barons of the Amazon and he wanted to look his best. But he should have watched out.

"My fault entirely."

Starr, in his amiable, way, actually believed it.

THE restaurant in Porto Risco had marble walls and mosaic walks out in front. It was a remnant of the wild-rubber boom which had collapsed forty years ago. The waiters were still pompous despite their threadbare tuxedos. They looked down their noses at Henry Starr, eyeing his mud-spattered clothes as if he were committing a personal affront. One of them objected to his bringing his basket into the dining room. It must be left with the Indio who bore his suitcase.

Starr explained politely that the basket's contents were very precious. As a matter of fact he was more concerned with the mud on the buddings than the mud on his clothes. He had cared for those buddings anxiously for days, packed them in sterilized sawdust, watched their temperature and moisture, examined them almost hourly for decay or infection. Each stick was actually pedigreed, a member of a famous family or clone of trees from the other side of the world.

The proprietor of the café was impressed. Since it was a matter of rubber, they would make an exception. Latex was the life-blood of Porto Risco. And this muddy guest must be

considered a personage of importance. He was ushered to one of the marble-topped tables and allowed to set the basket on a chair nearby.

The waiter, however, was not quite so courteous as the proprietor. He took the order from another diner who had come in later than Starr. This other diner seemed to be something of a personage, too. A large fleshy man who smelled of cologne and wore high boots that reached above his knees—the kind plantation overseers wear. The waiter ran to him, bowed and scraped, ran off, came back with an iced drink, then he talked with the fat man a long time, ignorin' Starr altogether.

It was provoking, for Starr was hungry, but he was no loud-mouthed tourist willing to create a scene and he wanted to make a good impression on the other guests—three handsome Brazilians at a corner table, two Enseñanza nuns on the veranda. Also he wanted to show the waiter that he bore no resentment at his serving the lordly looking fat man first. Starr was anything but lordly looking. With that basket he must have looked more like a peddler. And his clothes were soaked not with cologne, but with adobe. Waiters have a fine sense of distinction about such things.

"Beautiful town you have here," he said when the waiter finally noticed him. "Beautiful place, too—regular Paris café a thousand miles up the Amazon!"

"What do you want to eat?" The waiter evidently had not heard him or understood his affable remarks.

"I'd like ham and eggs. You see I've been on that freighter and haven't had any good old ham and eggs for—"

"This isn't breakfast. It's one o'clock. We have just what's on the menu, which you can read. Or can't you read?"

Starr looked up rather surprised. This was no Brazilian or Portuguese but a tough-looking, blue-jawed fellow who belonged on the waterfront at Mobile. At least his accent suggested Mobile definitely. "You're from the South aren't you? I mean the South in the States. You know—Dixie."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Maybe you're too busy to listen to a friendly observation. But I haven't seen anyone from the States for a long time."

"All right, so I'm from Alabama. Do you want the regular dinner?"

The waiter probably had a better job in the offing, what with the rubber boom, and was keeping this present job under protest. As Starr remembered, waiters were getting that way up in the States. At any rate he had no intention of starting an altercation—not with those nuns and those prosperous Brazilians looking on. It would be the wrong way to start his big work here in Porto Risco. So

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he went ahead and ordered the regular dinner.

When the waiter brought the soup he spilled half the plate on the table cloth—a very unusual accident, Starr reflected, unless it was done on purpose. But this, of course, was impossible. The fellow had bumped against the basket, come to think of it, so it might have been considered Starr's fault. But he could not help saying quietly, "Little shaky, aren't you? Hang-over? Spilled it all over the table."

"What's a little soup?"

"Bring something to mop it up," Starr suggested while he mopped his own lap with his napkin. The soup had spilled not only on his lap but in the water tumbler and butter dish. But apparently nothing was to be done about it.

"I would like to see the head waiter," Starr said, swallowing his anger.

"There isn't any. I'm the head waiter."

"Then the manager. Call the manager."

"Call him yourself. There he is," he nodded to the white-haired Brazilian who had been impressed with the contents of the basket.

STARR got up, but the old Brazilian came to him and said courteously, "I saw the accident, *senhor*. A regrettable matter. The *mozo* will bring a clean napkin to cover the spot of the accident."

"I'm the last to crab about an accident but—" Starr was about to say that the waiter was very surly about it, but he saw the two nuns turn to look at him. The three Brazilians and the perfumed fat man were also watching as if waiting for this North American to make a scene. "They are always fighting with waiters," he could imagine them saying. He sat down again but refused to touch his soup until the clean napkin was brought.

But it was not brought. This was no time for a hunger strike, for Starr had been looking forward to his first dinner ashore ever since he left Manáos. Nevertheless he stuck to it.

The waiter brought the next course and set it on a sideboard, noting that Starr had not finished his soup.

It was the old Brazilian manager who solved the deadlock. He brought the napkin himself. "This pig of a waiter," he apologized, "should be discharged. But I can get no man to take his place what with the war as well as the rubber boom. I beg you not to make a scene."

That was just it. They all expected him to make a scene. But Starr would not make it. After all he was something of an ambassador. The Rubber Development Corporation at Belem had told him, "You must be diplomatic in Porto Risco. Remember you are going to see the richest rubber baron in Amazonas State. And much depends on it!"

"No I will not make a scene," Starr said to the manager. "I have more important things to do than brawl with a surly waiter."

"Thank you, *senhor*. It is obvious you are a gentleman, as we say here—well born, *de boma familia!*" The smiling old manager brought the next dish himself after Starr had finished his cold soup.

The mutton was strong and tough; the rice, cooked in saffron and red peppers, was soggy; the jet black coffee was cold as the soup, but Starr said nothing. He ignored the waiter, finished his meal, paid his check. He noticed that the tip had been added to the bill but this was customary in some restaurants, even back in New York. He did not feel like arguing about a few *reis*.

He went out on the mosaic walk with his basket, called to a cab across the street. The cab driver looked back over his shoulder and then continued to talk with a street peddler. Starr crossed the street, followed by the Indio with his suitcase. But the cab man kept passing a card back and forth with the peddler, punching holes in it—evidently some sort of gambling game. Meanwhile a man whistled from the other side of the street. It was the pompous, sweet-scented dignitary who had been waited on in the café before his turn. The driver hurried over to him, touched his cadet cap. He talked for a long time, then came back, jumped in his car.

"Is this cab for hire or not?" Starr asked.

"Well, what do you think?"

"I want to go out to Clayburn's *estânçia*."

"Who's stopping you?" The driver looked at Starr's muddy clothes and the basket as if estimating how much to charge. He was a pinch-shouldered fellow who talked like any streetcar conductor back in the States and looked like one except for the black walrus moustache. "This cab's engaged by that gentleman over there. Couldn't you figure that out, or do you need glasses?"

"But I was here first. Aren't there any regulations in this town about cabs?"

"Hell, that's Clayburn's overseer and you talk about regulations!" He stared his engine. "I wouldn't take you anyway. You're all covered with mud and I just had my cab upholstered."

Some Indios stopped to watch. A Brazilian or two turned, smiling. Here was the usual American arguing about his fare.

The driver raised his voice so the whole street could hear. "And with that basket of vegetables, you aren't getting in my cab! Why don't you hire a pushcart?"

The engine raced, the car jumped forward, made a sharp U-turn to pick up the passenger across the street. Starr was still on the running-board but he had to step down to avoid being brushed off by a cart laden with cacao and dried fish.

That passing ox cart gave Starr time to think. If the passenger—the sweet-smelling fat man—had been anyone but Clayburn's overseer he would have fought. For the moment he intended

to fight anyway as he stood there spraddle-legged to balance himself and his basket. But he heard a voice behind him.

"*Senhor*, my respects to you!"

He turned to see a pug-dog face and pince-nez.

"You have had some trouble, I see," the port officer said, pointing to Starr's suit. "Did that cab driver spatter you?"

"No. It was another car. This cab man hasn't done anything, except ask for a fight."

"But you are not obliging him, I see. Bravo! It proves my observation. We of the Latin races are the ones who fly into a tantrum over a splash of mud. But you Yankees are first of all affable and friendly. You are, as one of your *presidentes* said, 'too proud to quarrel.'"

"Quarrel wasn't the word," Starr corrected. "When they ask for it, the right word is murder."

THOMÉ'S CANTINA was a large adobe saloon catering to the waterfront. Starr ducked in here, or rather slunk in, after the port officer had congratulated him on his Yankee amiability. The canny old Brazilian had offered to get another cab for him, but Starr was beginning to feel self-conscious about his clothes. A crowd had gathered, cars were honking at the traffic jam and he felt conspicuous as well as ridiculous. He decided definitely that he would not show himself in that street again until he had changed to a clean suit of whites.

The Indio boy lugging his suitcase, followed him, but because of the peculiar nature of Thomé's cantina, no one paid attention. Sailors from the river freighters went on drinking. Some percentage girls looked at him and decided that a bedraggled tourist like this was not the kind to spend money. A gaucho, who smelled of the pampas, of sweat and sweet rum, glared from under knitted brows, but seemed more interested in the Indio with the suitcase than in the shabby white man.

Starr got a drink, told the Indio to take the luggage to a booth in back, then dismissed him with a tip. Drawing the rattan curtain across the booth, he opened his suitcase and got out coat and pants of white drill, clean though badly in need of pressing. Before anyone had a chance to object to his using a booth for a dressing room, he changed his pants. Then he was interrupted.

It was not the bartender, or the proprietor, or even a percentage girl. It was a lean man with skin that looked like hide cured in wood-ash lye. A handsome fellow in a rough way, with gray-blue eyes and a grin that was definitely Yank. It was a grin just like Starr's own, or like that of any American meeting a compatriot in a strange port. The bond between them was strong and instant, for the man's suit of whites was spattered, like Starr's, with reddish mud!

"Heard that taxi sassing you. I was going to help you out if you punched him."

"Have a drink," Starr said.

"No thanks. We shouldn't drink in the tropics, us Yanks. But here's a cigar. My name's O'Dea. Exporting. Feathers and jaguar skins."

Starr shook hands, told his name and business, started changing his belt from the muddy trousers to the clean pair.

"Who spattered *you*?" O'Dea asked.

"A car with a beautiful woman."

"Was she driving the car?"

"No, it was her chauffeur. Skidded in a mud puddle. Couldn't help it, I figured."

"*You* figured!"

Starr looked at him, definitely intrigued. His inflection said a lot more than could be put in one sentence. It said enough for three: The chauffeur did it on purpose. The waiter spilled soup on purpose. The cab driver had insulted him on purpose. One insult after another. Indignation could not be heaped unwittingly in such a definite pattern—not in Brazil of all countries. In London, perhaps, where the cabbies are famous for their brass. In Paris, perhaps, where the taxi drivers are the world's worst. But not in Brazil! "Of course there must be a reason," Starr thought aloud.

"You're a Yankee. That's the reason."

Starr puzzled over this as he put on a clean jacket, hung the other over a chair, for it was too muddy to pack in his suitcase. "It's the first time I ever heard of Brazilians deliberately insulting Yanks."

"Ever hear of Thomas Clayburn?"

"Yes, but—"

"Well, he's a Brazilian—with a South Carolina name—Thomas Lee Clayburn, and he'll insult a Yankee any chance he gets."

This reminded Starr of a curious bit of history which he had learned from the R.D.C. at Belem. During the carpetbagger days after the Civil War, certain Confederate families fled to Brazil, started new plantations, built new homes. Self-exiled from their beloved South Carolina, they kept the Civil War green and never forgot the carpetbaggers who had persecuted them.

"This Clayburn," O'Dea explained, "is the son of a Confederate exile and his father must've kept the hate growing hotter and hotter. He's crazy, and I mean crazy. That is, on the one subject. Mention a Yankee to him and he chews rugs."

It was understandable, Starr reflected as he finished changing his clothes. The injustice of the Reconstruction era had left a deep wound. But whereas in the States the wound had healed, down here in the miasmic heat of the Amazon it festered perpetually.

"I don't think he'll chew rugs when he sees me," Starr said confidently. "I have letters

"Show us! My **seringueiros** *have done this work for five centuries. I'll not have you meddling with their methods!" roared Clayburn.*

from the Instituto Agronomico which is Brazilian and the R.D.C. which is American. That doesn't make me a Yankee. It makes me an envoy of two big governments."

"You mean you're going out to his house to see him?" O'Dea gasped. "He'll have you horsewhipped!"

"Crazy as he is, I think he'll be interested in what I have to show him. Besides, they don't horsewhip envoys."

"No. They nail horseshoes to their feet. That's what happened to the last Yankee who went up there a year ago. Clayburn's rubber collectors got him off in the jungle and nailed the shoes on him. How would you like to have rusty nails hammered up through your instep? Gangrene—that's what happened. They had to amputate his legs."

"If Clayburn did that, he'd have hanged."

"He's too rich to hang. He's the richest man in Amazonas state and with the biggest rubber holdings—next to Fordlandia."

"And I'll show him how they're getting latex in Fordlandia. I'll make him richer. He'll listen to me."

"He'll listen while you're in a hospital having wooden legs fitted. Or while you're in a *carcere* wishing you could get in touch with an American consul."

"You're going to fast. How do I get in a *carcere?*"

"What do you think all those rats have been insulting you for? They want to get you into a fight. Then you get jailed."

"As simple as that," Starr said thoughtfully. "They're going to insult me until I fight back!"

"Exactly. You'll fight sooner or later. You're an American. That's what happend to me."

"You mean—you were jailed?"

"Not yet. But I will be if the *policia* get me. You see, I wouldn't swallow those insults, not the way you did. I fought."

STARR was beginning to understand a few peculiarities about this man O'Dea. He had slipped into the booth noiselessly, probably from another booth where Starr had not seen him sitting. He had not seen him for the simple reason that O'Dea had been hiding. And now that he was in this booth he sat in an inside corner in the shadow, his eyes constantly watching the slits of bamboo curtain.

"The fact is," O'Dea said, "I'm waiting my chance to slip out of town. Going to stow away on the next freighter down-river. I'm not going to their damned *carcere*. It's full of scorpions—they tell me. And you can't get out. You telegraph your consul and he never gets your message. You just rot."

"If I can do anything to help you—" Starr began.

"Nothing. I came to help *you*—by giving you a good tip."

Starr felt a surge of sympathy as well as admiration. He would have been in this man's boots if he had not taken those insults lying down. "*You* fought back!" he said with feeling.

"It wasn't a fight. Just a cab driver splashed mud on me and then jeered. I pulled him out of his cab and put him to sleep. Of course they said I killed him."

This was quite a confession to make to a stranger—even though the stranger happened to be a fellow countryman. But O'Dea made it, Starr realized, because he could no longer hide the truth. For out there in the saloon an official with pince-nez was talking to the bartender.

"Guess I better be going," O'Dea said.

It looked for a moment as if he had come to this decision a bit too late, for the bartender was nodding to the port officer and pointing back into the hall of booths.

"Take it easy," Starr said. "Maybe they're looking for me, not you." He got up and drew aside the rattan enough to slip out. He met the port officer and the bartender who were coming through the crowd of stevedores and deckhands.

The officer looked at Starr, smiled, turned to the bartender. "No, this is not the man I am looking for."

The bartender shrugged. "You said a North American. I thought for sure that—"

"No. This is a good man. He is a rubber technician who has business with the Don

Clayburn. I have seen his credentials." He turned again to Starr. "Sorry, *senhor*, for this mistake. Someone said a man who was spattered with mud had come in this cantina—"

"Yes," Starr said readily. "I am the one." He explained to the barkeep. "But I just changed my clothes in that booth back there." He felt exuberant. He was helping a fellow countryman out of a jam and it gave him a glow of satisfaction. After the indignities they had heaped on him, it served this town right! Instead of fighting them and being thrown in jail, he was saving another Yank from the hoosegow. But the port officer and the bartender were still suspicious for they followed Starr down the hall.

To his enormous relief he discovered that O'Dea had had time to slip out. The booth was empty, except for the basket of buddings and the muddy jacket hanging over the back of a chair.

"Yes, I see how it happened," the officer said politely. "You came in with muddy clothes and they thought you were someone else, someone who is wanted for murder. But now," he said to the bartender, "you can see he is dressed in a clean suit of whites, but he is the same man. My apologies, *senhor*."

Starr packed up his trousers, transferred the cash and wallet, pencils and odds and ends to his fresh suit. He had a sudden rather logical pang just before he found his wallet in the inside pocket of his coat. This man O'Dea, "wanted for murder," had had a good chance to steal it! But it was still there, and so was the roll of bills, four of them *contos*, which in the excitement Starr had left right there in his discarded trousers! Bill D'Dea might have knocked out a cab driver and he might have had a murder planted on him, but he was certainly no pickpocket!

At least that was what Starr thought until some hours later when he reached Thomas Clayburn's manse in the middle of the jungle.

Then he discovered that a certain envelope in his wallet was empty—the envelope in which he had kept his letter of introduction to the fanatical Clayburn, and his credentials identifying him as a rubber technician of the R.D.C. at Belem.

CHAPTER II

AMANHA!

IT WAS too late to go back and report to the police. It would be an awkward report to make at best. "A man wanted for murder, and calling himself O'Dea, has stolen my papers."

The *policia* would ask, "Why are you so sure?" And if Starr told them, they would say, "Then why did you tell the *capitão do porto* that you saw no one in that booth? Evidently you aided in his escape and he is a murderer. Hence, instead of helping you find your papers, we will be logical in this matter and put you in the *carcere*."

Starr decided to meet Thomas Lee Clayburn without a letter of introduction.

He'd had trouble enough getting here. There were only a few cars for hire in Porto Risco and when he found a driver willing to take him out to the manse he was charged an exorbitant rate. Not only that, but ten miles out in the jungle the driver announced that he was out of gas. Doubtless it was a lie, but a gun on the driver's hip gave it a semblance of reality. Starr came the rest of the way in a wooden wheeled oxcart.

He had checked his suitcase at the cantina in town, but he still had his basket with its sticks and sterilized sawdust. It would have been more dignified, perhaps, to pay a preliminary visit to Clayburn and bring this basket later. That was the way a good salesman would go about it. But Starr had the feeling that this visit would not be a preliminary to a second. It would be the first and last.

With the basket on his arm, he left the oxcart and trudged up the driveway of palms toward the Clayburn manse. He thought the driveway through the garden would be a short enough walk, but he had a faulty conception of the garden of an Amazonian rubber baron. He walked a mile, then another. There was no end to this double row of palms and undulating lawns. It seemed to continue to the horizon, to the very Andes. Actually, it was five miles.

His shoes were scuffed, his feet burned, his suit was wilted and sticking to his body when he reached the last clearing of flat lawns. He limped up to the gallery between the moss-stained columns and there a woolly haired servant met him.

"Yes? And what do you want, *senhor?*" The Negro did not talk with a Southern accent but his natural drawl made it sound the same. So did the setting. Starr was in an old Southern manse that had been transplanted from Dixie—the Dixie of Jefferson Davis.

He told his business. The servant left and after a significantly long delay, came back. "The Don Clayburn says this is something for the overseer to attend to." Again his drawl gave the words a definite meaning, just as thought he had said, "The Don can not be bothered with white trash like you."

There was another long delay as the servant went for the overseer. The delays were purposeful, of course, emphasizing the rebuff. Impatient at the long wait, Starr crossed the broad gallery and looked into the door. Another servant was standing there like a sentry, but Starr could see the spacious interior of the manse with an inside gallery of iron like many of the old plantation houses in Louisiana. It was a perfect flashback to the history of the

Old South. Especially because of the young girl on the balcony of the wall, looking down toward the front door.

If she had been in crinoline the resurrection of the past would have been perfect. But she was in riding habit, her hair parted and bobbed at the shoulders. She held an enormous mastiff by the scruff to keep him from barking at the stranger. It was a terrifying looking beast, cross-bred perhaps with a Dane. Starr had heard about Thomas Clayburn's granddaughter, and something about her dogs and horses. She raised blooded horses but was not so particular about the blood of her dogs. It was a southern trait—to love all dogs, no matter what breed, so long as they could hunt. She was a chip of the old block, Starr had heard at Belem. Her father, a sporting man and a *tenente-coloñel* in the Brazilian Army had been killed in a duel. Her mother died when her child was born.

"All right, what do you want here?"

This was said by a sharp voice behind Starr's shoulder. He had smelled the man before he heard him. Turning, he looked into the pudgy brown face, the perfumed little mustache of Clayburn's overseer.

Starr wanted to say, "So you're the fellow that waiter served before he would serve me! And you took my cab from under my nose!" He doubled his fist, but then stopped to think. If he had kept out of a brawl in Porto Risco, he was certainly going to keep out of one here.

He said quietly, "I came to see Mr. Clayburn. I've come a long way to see him in person."

"You have been told, I think, that the Don Clayburn will not bother with you. Or perhaps you are deaf." The overseer thwacked his high boots with the gaucho quirt that hung from his wrist. "Besides, why do you come to the front door, I'd like to know? Tradespeople do not belong on this veranda."

Starr stuck to his resolve to hold his temper. "I'm not a tradesman. I'm not selling anything, I'm giving it."

"That is a very old platitude of canvassers." The fat man turned, but Starr followed, talking to his back.

"I intend to see Mr. Clayburn, but if you're his overseer, I can tell you a thing or two first. Your rubber is graded very low at the port of arrival, and I believe I can show you the remedy. For one thing, your collectors are cheating because they are paid by weight. It is plain enough that they increase the weight with sand and stones and uncured latex."

"Look here! I wish you wouldn't follow me around. I said, go away! Or shall I throw you off this veranda?"

Starr put his basket on the veranda floor and his eyes narrowed. "Yes," he said, "you might try it."

The fat man, rather taken aback at this sudden turn of attitude, thwacked his boots as if to whip up his own courage. "Is it possible you are threatening me?"

"Why whip your legs that way? Why don't you use that whip on me and see what happens?"

A gentle voice said, "*Senhor!*"

Starr turned and saw the lady of the jewels and the black mantilla. He could never forget that patrician face and the high proud eyebrows. He took off his hat, his face shining wet with embarrassment, but shining also with delight.

"I told Senhor Clayburn how my driver was very rude to you, after he had splashed you with mud. And I wish to make amends. I am the *senhora* Clayburn. Will you come in?"

AT BELEM Starr had been told that Thomas Lee Clayburn might prove a hard man to deal with. That was when he heard of that curious bit of history concerning the Confederate exiles in Brazil. He had also heard that Clayburn's health, as well as his ambition, had been sapped by the paludian fevers of the Amazon. In his day he had lived high. He had even been something of a rake, an inveterate gambler, a judge of show points in both horses and women. He had been married four times. Three wives were Brazilian, the fourth a young Spanish beauty. This was the gracious *senhora* whom Starr was now facing. He bowed, then picked up his basket of sticks.

In the galleried hall Thomas Lee Clayburn sat in his wheel chair, his eyes glowing under gray brows, his lips clamped so that his goatee tipped up at a fighting angle. Behind him stood a brown-skinned servant girl, a *crillo*. She was quite a beauty in a barbaric way, a contrast to the elegant *senhora* who sat at some distance, embroidering hearts and flowers on a circle of silk. A contrast to both was the tanned blond girl who stood with the mastiff at the foot of the staircase.

It was a wide-spaced grouping of characters dominated by one tall, majestic figure in the uniform of a Confederate brigadier. It was a spirit hovering over this house, ruling it, scowling on it. This portrait, Starr guessed, was of the South Carolina refugee who had fled the carpetbagger persecutions in '67. The man in the wheel chair—not as lifelike as the painting—must have been his son.

"I understand that an injury was done you in the street at Porto Risco," Clayburn began.

"I've forgotten all about that, sir. It was an accident—"

Clayburn put up his hand. He did not admit that it was an accident, nor deny it, nor apologize for it. He called to his overseer who was standing at the front door. "Write this man a check for two *contos* for a new suit. That's a

hundred dollars in your American gold," he said, glaring at Starr and his basket. He was glaring not at a scientist with a basket of pedigreed buddings, but at a Yankee with a carpetbag, a hereditary enemy who had come to "reconstruct" his home.

Starr protested again. "I've made no complaint about that measly little incident, sir. I'm here on much more important business." He tore up the check which the overseer handed him. "My business here, Mr. Clayburn, is to show you how to produce more rubber—"

"Show us! My *seringueriros* have done this work for five centuries and a Yankee comes to tell them how to do it! I have trouble enough getting tappers without you meddling with their methods!"

"You would have less trouble getting them, sir, if you adopted our plan. If each tapper had twenty acres of his own, with four hundred trees, so that he could be his own *seringalista*—"

"You talk like the carpetbaggers who promised easier work to the Negroes of the South!" Clayburn pointed to the brigadier on the wall. "You Yankees ruined my father after the Civil War. And thirty years ago you ruined me. You took our seeds from Brazil and started new plantations on the other side of the world."

"I am bringing the seeds back from Malaya, right here in this basket!" Starr announced. "Besides, it was not the Yankees who took your seeds. If I could show your collectors how to bud over the wild hevea—"

"If they did that, then what? We get more rubber, yes—after a long time. Then the war will be over." It was quite obvious to Starr that, aside from his obsession about Yankees, old Clayburn had the attitude of many of the rubber barons of the Amazon. After the war, what was going to happen to Brazilian rubber?"

"You'll stop buying the day the war's over," Clayburn stormed. "My *seringueiros* will starve as they did after the last boom. I've had enough of your Yankee booms. So now—"

His voice broke as he was on the point of ordering this intruder out of his house. But Clayburn did not forget that he was the host, and this man was under his roof. A wilted and weary-looking traveler like this must be fed—fêted if a friend, and fed if an enemy—at least in the back yard. Clayburn did not forget it. Several generations of Southerners behind him had never forgotten it.

"I understand you arrived here on foot." He turned to a servant. "See that he gets some means of going back to Porto Risco where he belongs. And"—he wheeled his chair, heading for a door—"give him something to eat."

Starr stood alone in the vast hall. At least he felt as if he were alone after Clayburn and his wife and daughter went out. But there were still eyes glittering at him from black faces in every corner. And behind him he could hear the overseer's *rehenque* whip thwacking against leather. The only substantial presence was the brigadier in the Confederate uniform up there on the wall. Because of the peculiarity of portraits, no matter what the angle, his eyes focused on Starr. The South Carolina aristocrat glared imperiously at this "carpetbagger" who had come, as they came after the Civil War, to molest his home and his plantation.

"Well? And why do you stand there?" This was said by the overseer with a grunt. "If you are waiting for food, it will be served out on the veranda. Not here."

"I'm not waiting for food. If Clayburn doesn't want to listen to me, then I'll start at the bottom. I'll tell the rubber collectors what's to be done."

"So you are the new *capitaz* of the rubber collectors?"

"No, but I would like to talk to the *capitaz*. And to any other *seringueiros* who care to listen. I will show them how to bud the trees and they can show the others."

"And you expect a delegation of collectors to leave their work and listen to your lecture?" The overseer laughed.

"It is a good idea," A girl's voice spoke up. Clarissa Clayburn had just stepped in from a back door, carrying a tray with some food and a bottle of wine.

The brown-skinner servant girl, a **Crillo,** *was quite a beauty in a barbaric way.*

IT WAS the first time Starr had noticed the color of the girl's eyes. Her skin, with its golden tan, was as dark as a Brazilian's but her eyes were a gem-like blue. Setting her tray on a table, she dismissed the overseer with a nod, then said to Starr, "You are not a very hot-headed man, are you?"

"There are times when it's best to be cool-headed."

"There's never a time to accept an insult."

"When I'm insulted for something that happened three generations ago I'll stop to think. I've got an important job to do. Mud-slinging won't stop me from doing it."

"I heard about the mud-slinging. And I heard about what happened in the café. The overseer was there and saw it. A waiter deliberately threw soup on you. And in the street a cab driver told you to get a pushcart. My father would have killed them both."

Her own father had been killed, Starr remembered, because of a duel over some insult he'd refused to accept.

She said, "You don't have a gun, do you?"

"What would a rubber technician be doing with a gun?"

"You may need one if you go too far in these jungle *estradas.*" She was referring, perhaps, to that incident of the man who'd had mule shoes nailed to his feet. But that incident may have been a hoax, Starr reflected. At least he had heard of it from an unreliable source—the pickpocket who called himself O'Dea.

"Besides," the girl went on, "you'll find our *seringueiros* won't listen very hard—not to a Yankee who's shown everyone he doesn't intend to fight. You can't change them by talking. They'll just say *'amanha'*. You've heard the Mexicans say that perhaps. It's the same as *mañana,* not now, tomorrow, later."

She was interrupted by Clayburn's voice calling irascibly from the next room as he pounded his cane. "Where is she? What's she doing? Tell her to come here this minute!"

"Sit down and eat your lunch," Clarissa said to Starr. Then, as she turned to the door, "And think it over."

Starr had only half finished his guava, cold chicken and wine when the *senhora* came in. He stood respectfully, straightened his tie and made a small bow.

"The overseer has just told us what you wish to do," she said. "Sit down, *senhor,* please." She sat on the sofa near him, her fingers busy with her needlework. "I came to explain my husband's attitude," she began quietly. "I am not a Southerner; there is no blood of Confederates in my veins, hence I have no sympathy with his obsession. But I want you to understand that the obsession is not his real reason for refusing your help."

"No, *senhora.* I believe he has some honest reasons."

"He is afraid of what will happen after the war. He can not forget the suffering when the last boom was over."

"But the last boom was in wild rubber," Starr explained. "This time it will last if Brazil can produce as cheaply as Malaya. That is what I am here for, to show you how."

"I understand that. You came to help us. And the *donzela* understands it too. You have two of us who are sympathetic. If you want to teach our collectors how to produce more, I can not see what harm you could possibly do." She added with decision, "Yes! I want you to teach them!"

"Then I have your permission, *senhora?*" Starr asked eagerly. "I can go through your rubber stands and tell your collectors what should be done?"

Her answer was to summon the overseer. When he came in she said, "Mr. Starr is going to show our *seringueiros* some new methods which will benefit us. Get the *capitaz* of the collectors to take him to the rubber stands."

The overseer objected weakly, "But, *senhora,* the *Don* says—"

"I will explain to the *don* right now." She got up to go. At the door she said, "And have a horse saddled for Mr. Starr, Manoel. He has walked far enough for one day."

Starr and the overseer were left facing each other. The mustache blobs jerked up as Manoel smiled, showing his teeth. "So! You have a friend in court!"

"Two friends," Starr corrected, sitting down to finish his lunch.

"Yes. The *donzela* too! Quite a ladies' man." He turned and swashbuckled to the front door, where he paused. "The *capitaz* will be ready when you are, *senhor.*"

It was the first time he had used that ordinary title of respect, but in using it his high, fat man's voice was a jeer.

IT WAS not a very imposing *capitaz* that Starr found out on the lawn. The very old and half-naked Indio looked more like a savage that had wandered from his home swamp. And judging by the overseer's instructions, given in sign language, he was stone deaf.

"He will take you to the nearest Hevea stand," the overseer said, smiling, "where you will find the collectors at work."

"I thought I was to have a horse," Starr said.

"Yes, your mount is ready, *senhor.*" From the quadrangle in back of the manse a stable *moco* led a sleepy-eared mule with a gaucho saddle.

Starr turned to the overseer, fists doubled. "I'd like to settle my score with you right now! But you're the *senhora's* servant so I won't hurt you—yet!"

"Not yet, but when, *senhor?*" The overseer drew back his jacket, showing his fat hip and a gun. "When will you hurt me?"

"After I'm through with the important part of my job," Starr said, swinging up to the woolen pad which was the mule's saddle.

Following the deaf mute who rode a donkey, he crossed the clearing to the first *estrada.* These *estradas* were cut into the jungle for the rubber collectors, most of them narrow foot paths overhung with lianas. The one which the guide picked out grew narrower and darker and the jungle grew wilder as they rode on.

In a small clearing they found two tappers at a coagulating fire, busy turning a stick and pouring latex over it.

"Why do you stand for hours in that suffocating smoke?" Starr asked. "You can get the same result by mixing the Hevea milk with the milk of a fig tree that grows right here all around you—" He waved his hand to the surrounding jungle and then noticed that two more men were watching him.

These rubber collectors always worked in pairs, hence he had an audience of five, if he counted the deaf *capitaz.* One of the five, however, was more interested in the mule than in Starr. He went up to the mule's off-hind leg and examined the shoe. "This *mulo* is about to cast a shoe, *senhor.* But I will remedy the matter." The shoe did not seem to be loose at all, that is, not until the man started to pry it off.

But Starr did not notice what was happening for he was too enthused about his work. He told the other four men to watch carefully as he took a stick from his basket, cut a sliver and then picked out a young sapling. "I'm going to show you how to grow a tree that won't die with the blight—a tree that will give you all the milk you want without strangling." He made an incision and stuck the sliver under the bark, wrapping the patch with waterproofed muslin. When he looked up he saw eight men watching him. They had come not like men but like wild animals stalking him. It gave him an uncomfortable feeling, especially when he saw still more sombreros poked up over the brush on all sides.

The very old and half-naked Indio looked more like a savage than the capitaz *of the region's wealthiest rubber plantation.*

But he noticed that they were not all watching him. Quite a number had their eyes glued on the mule and the man who was busy prying off that "loose" shoe.

Still obsessed with his work, Starr beckoned to the crowd to gather. "Come on! I'm teaching you something." He finished the bud patch. "As simple as bandaging a cut on your hand," he explained. "Now you try it." He cut off some more slivers, handed them around. "I want you to make a bud patch on every sapling in this stand."

A part of the crowd seemed definitely intrigued, smiling, nodding.

"All right, why don't you get to work?"

They shrugged and then gave the answer that Clarissa Clayburn had prophesied.

"Amanha."

"Not tomorrow. Now! If you do as I say you rubber collectors will never be out of work."

The rasp of a file on a mule shoe startled him. They were all looking at him from head to foot and he imagined correctly that they were making sure he wore no gun. Then one of them said, "We have worked a long time collecting our latex and smoking it. We are tired. But this is a wonderful thing you have shown us. Yes, we will do it—*amanha.*"

Starr picked up his basket. He had wasted a lot of time. But he had no intention of riding back to Porto Risco. He could try again with another bunch of collectors. Of course they

would give the same answer, *"Amanha!"* But that did not mean that they were not learning something. *Amanha,* after all, did not mean never. It meant *tomorrow. If I came back tomorrow—with a gun on my hip . . .*

He went to his mule. But the man who had discovered the "loose" shoe said, "If you will wait, *senhor,* we will rasp a shoe to the proper fitting so that you can go farther on this day's journey."

While they led the mule to the coagulation fire, Starr studied the faces of the men that surrounded him. Some were intelligent, some brutal and savage. He was not sure that they were all rubber hunters. The intelligent ones were probably the usual *caboclos*—Portuguese and Indian—who collected rubber in the Amazon. But the others looked like untamed tribesmen. Two of the latter were making a "heat" and shaping up the mule shoe. Starr noticed that the iron was taking on a queer form. The mule shoe, narrower than a horse shoe to begin with, was being hammered still narrower and longer.

They were heeling and toeing the iron to the size of a human foot!

CHAPTER III

A MAN WELL SHOD

STARR kept talking, even as he glanced over his shoulder trying to decide which way to get out.

"I am telling you these things for your own good!" he cried excitedly. "Some of these trees have been killed by incisions which you make too wide and deep! You've killed others by tapping too high!" His eyes darted in every direction in search of the nearest *estrada,* but each one was blocked by a group of men.

Still pretending that he did not know what they were about to do to him, he kept rattling on wildly, "You see, you gain little by strangling these trees! Yes, the latex flows faster, but the tree will die—"

He realized he could not run away—not with that basket on his arm. And to discard the basket would be like throwing a child to a wolf pack. But he started to back away from the main group of men who were shaping up that mule shoe. Then he whirled, intending to dive into the nearest wall of brush.

A huge man on a *criollo* pony was staring at him through the ferns. Starr could not smell the cologne, but he could see the tiny mustache twitching.

"So you been talking to our collectors," the overseer chuckled, riding out to the clearing. "We give you a mule and you ride around stirring up labor troubles."

Starr did not bother to deny it. His eyes gradually focused, narrowing murderously on the swollen figure of the overseer above him.

"You come here to teach us how to grow rubber," the overseer hooted. "You with your basket of shoots. No! You are not teaching us. We are teaching you!"

Starr hugged his precious basket, realizing slowly that he was hugging it not of his own will but because of a lariat that one of the Indios had dropped around his arms and waist.

"And after we teach you this lesson, you will never come near this estate again!" The overseer laughed and some of the Indios laughed with him, the parrots giving a hilarious echo.

Starr found out soon enough that his captors' intention involved neither torture, nor murder, nor even bodily injury. Their punishment of the Yankee carpetbagger, he discovered clearly, was to be mental not physical. Mule shoes nailed to the bare feet of a man, he imagined vividly, would approximate a crucifixion. It would be the most exquisite pain ever brought to a victim. But this was in his imagination only.

"Take off his shoes," the overseer said in Portuguese.

Starr drew his knee up, intending to kick at the man who came toward him. But there was plenty of time for another Indio, standing at his side, to flip a second loop over him so that his knee was snagged there, tight against his chest.

While they unlaced his shoes and pulled them off, he saw the other group at the smoke oven. They had two mule shoes heeled and toed now, using a log of quebracho wood for an anvil. Quebracho, which they call the "ax-breaker" in this country, was hard enough for the purpose. Evidently one of the Indios was a blacksmith who took care of the mules and *criollos* of the rubber hunters, for he had everything but the anvil right here. Steam hissed as the shoes were doused in a slack-tub. There was the smell of burnt rubber soles instead of acrid hoof smoke. It might very well have been the smell of flesh burning, for until this very moment Starr had believed the irons were to be nailed to his own feet.

He was not even sure until they put his own shoes on again. They had to yank and tug as they put them on, for with the mule shoes nailed to the rubber soles, they were drawn and smaller. When they had them laced, two of the Indios lifted him to his feet.

He stood there spraddle-legged to keep his balance, like a newborn colt. He looked down at his feet with the definite impression that they were not his own feet at all. They were just hanging there somewhere beneath him. They had done a good job of it, cinching the nails which had been driven through the rubber soles, but these turned-over nails pressed against his instep and ball and heel. It was painful, even though he had not yet tried to

walk. The thought of walking made him wince.

Of course he could kick his shoes off if they would only leave him alone for a minute. But then he discovered to his surprise that they had laced them with wire! And they had bound the wire around his shank several times in sandal fashion under his sole. His feet were thoroughly encased as if with the iron *crillos* the Argentines used on political prisoners.

As the blacksmith and his helpers stood back, the overseer jeered, "Now go back to Porto Risco and tell what happened to you, and let them laugh. We have done you no harm. Tell them you fell off a mule and some Indios nailed the mule shoes to your rubber soles so you could walk. Tell the police and let them laugh still louder!"

Following the deaf-mute who rode a donkey, Starr crossed the clearing to the first estrada.

Starr took a step forward. He staggered. The men around him tried to laugh again but the sound turned to queer, forced chuckles, then silence as they stared. This man with the feet of a mule was taller now. His eyes blazed. He was changed, somehow. Their practical joke, transforming him to half-man, half-mule, had worked some sort of unintended magic.

They saw him walking toward their master, lifting one foot after the other, then thumping it down with a clang as iron struck stone. They saw him stalking the fat man who was backing away to his horse.

The overseer's forehead wrinkled in sudden apprehension. He reached for his gun but seemed afraid to draw it. His fear was logical for if he killed this man there would be a trial. He might go to jail. These Indios, some of them rubber-tappers, might tell different stories of how this murder had been committed. In his irresolution the overseer looked as if he were hypnotized by this tall clumping figure that was stalking him!

The Indios who saw it were terrified. They turned and ran off into the thicket, then the whole crowd darted away into different *estradas*.

The overseer was the last. And then he fled with the rest of them; fled a Frankenstein's monster of his own creation.

Starr lurched to a tree bole, sat down, then tried to take his shoes off. Since the wires had been twisted together by pliers there was no remote possibility of untwisting them with bare fingers. He searched in his pockets for a knife but remembered that two of those breeds had searched him. He had nothing with which to cut the canvas of his shoes, and even if he

had, he would still have to cut the wires which bound his feet like sandal straps.

But with the hope of cutting or filing or twisting the wires, he got up to search for a sharp rock. He tried to walk, lifting his feet clumsily like something stuck on fly paper. He was alone now except for the parrots and macaws watching him one-eyed. They had never seen men walk like this man! It was not the weight of the mule shoes that gave him that awkward prancing gait, as much as his hesitancy to bear down. He walked like a man with stones in his shoes, unable to put the slightest weight on the ball of his feet. He tried to walk on his heels, but even that way every cinched nail pressed into his flesh.

He could find no rock sharp enough in this swampy, alluvial ground but he found a stick of hardwood and this he splintered. He sat down and tore at the canvas, succeeded in punching a hole, then twisted the canvas like a tourniquet. But that was about all it amounted to—a tourniquet cutting off the circulation in his feet. As he punched more holes, tearing the canvas, his feet began to swell.

The more he worked, the more those cinched nail-tops ate into his flesh. And as his flesh puffed, the wires seemed to nestle tighter.

He got up again to search for a sharper rock with which to file the wire, but the hopelessness of such a plan started a feeling of panic. How many stones, however sharp, would it take to file through just one strand of wire? The stone would have to be something like quartz—but there was no such formation here.

He picked up two more branches of wood, broke them into proper lengths for crutches. Thus he hopped along with a forlorn notion of finding a pair of pliers or a file in some *seringueiro's* hut. As he limped along the trail toward Port Risco, a picture began to sharpen in his mind.

He would limp into town like this with everyone laughing. Oxcart drivers, candy vendors, shopkeepers, muleteers would line the street as he staggered on down toward the riverfront. "There is the Yankee from the R.D.C. who thought to teach the Don Clayburn how to produce rubber!"

He pictured himself reporting to the police, as the overseer had suggested. The police and the *capitão do porto* would be polite. "But all they did to you was to destroy a pair of your shoes. Senhor Clayburn, doubtless, will buy you another pair. Why don't you complain to him? Yes, you have a case. A pair of shoes. Bring suit against him. But can you prove that they were Clayburn's *seringueiros* or merely some Indians playing pranks? Will the overseer admit he put them up to it?"

The *policia* would laugh. And when he sent his report down to the R.D.C. at Belem, he could see them laughing too. He would be laughed at all the way from Porto Risco to Santarem, to Belem and on up to the States!

He flopped to the ground. His feet were puffy throbbing balls now. "I can report this. But I would rather get my hands on a gun!"

GRIMLY enough, because of a logical turn of events, he found that it was much simpler to get a gun than to get a pair of pliers.

It was logical that Clayburn's granddaughter had heard something of what had happened. She knew for one thing that Starr had been given, not a horse as the *senhora* had ordered, but a mule. It was possible that she had even heard that the overseer had followed him. At any rate she came hunting.

She came with two of the plantation workers, old *caboclos* who knew the rubber stands. And these two who acted as an escort for the *donzela*, naturally enough were armed.

They found Starr sprawled, half sitting, his back against a moss-covered stump, his long legs stretched out in front of him wide apart, his toes pointed upward at a stiff angle.

Clarissa Clayburn stared aghast before dismounting. It was a stare of pity—a look that maddened Starr for her pity obviously was for something utterly helpless and beaten.

She jumped from her pony, ran to him, knelt beside him. When she saw his swollen feet she gasped. "They hammered nails into your feet! They tortured you!"

"No. I tortured myself. I tried to walk. If I could get my shoes off I'd be all right."

The two old *caboclos* had jumped from their ponies. One of them clasped his hands and exclaimed, "Whoever did this thing shall be flogged! The don will have them flogged to their death!"

The girl was already trying to tear off the iron shoes. Then she tried to untwist the wires with her bare fingers. "Help me," she said to the men. "Get something to cut these wires! Don't stand there praying!"

Squatting on the ground, each man took one of Starr's feet in his lap. As they yanked and tugged, the girl could see Starr's forehead streaming with sweat. "Stop it and find out how to do it without making it worse!"

"The wires are too deep in the flesh, *senhorinha,*" one of the old fellows fairly wept. "It will be impossible to cut them, but very simple to untwist the ends." They palavered with each other. One went to his saddlebag, but came back shaking his head. The other had taken out his knife and after studying the wires and the puffed blue flesh, he shook his head also. They argued some more. They had no file, no pliers.

The girl snapped to one of them angrily, "Go and get some! And send someone to tell my grandfather—no, never mind that. Get the pliers and come back! And you—" she spoke to

the other—"get some water. We'll wrap bandages around his feet and get the swelling down."

When the *caboclos* swung to their ponies and rode off, Starr told everything that happened.

"Will you be able to identify them when we bring them to my grandfather?"

"I won't have to identify them to anybody," Starr said in a queer voice. "I'll attend to them myself."

"But who were they?"

"The overseer was the ring-leader."

"Manoel! My grandfather won't believe it!"

"No one has to believe it," Starr repeated. "He'll say it was some Indians, of course. And it was. Some Indians he brought along with him. And there were others who just watched. But they had nothing to do with it."

"What others?"

"Some rubber-tappers I'd been talking to. Most of them listened to me, even though they said just what you told me they'd say, *amanha*. But I taught them something. And I'm going to teach them a lot more! They won't say *amanha* the next time!"

"You mean you're still going to stick to it—even after this!" She looked at his feet.

"I'm going about it in a different way."

She saw the glare in his eyes—the glare that had frightened the crowd of Indios and the overseer. "You're going about it in a different way," she repeated, nodding. "You're going to fight? But do you know how to fight?"

"I'm a Yankee, as your grandfather says," Starr grunted, as if that were answer enough.

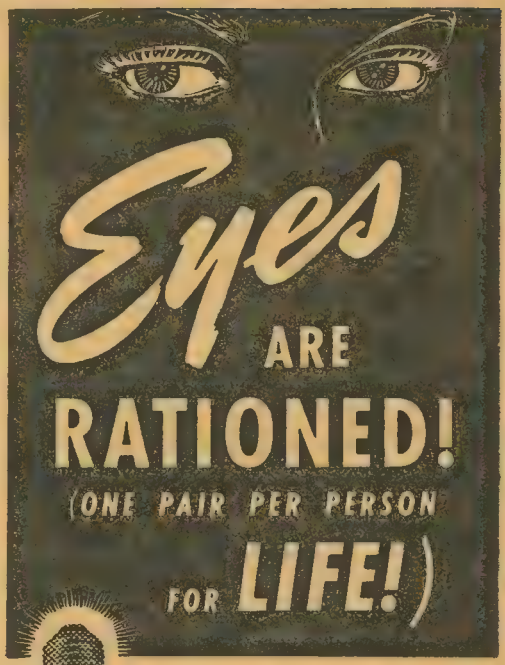
"I mean do you know how to shoot a gun?"

"Give me one, if you want me to prove it." He wanted to tell her that Southerners were not the only Americans with a predilection for shooting. It was in the blood of Northerners, too, whose fathers had fought Mohawks long before the Southerners ever tangled with the Seminoles. "I'm just average," he said to her, "but that's going to be good enough, if I can only get my hands on a gun!"

One of the old *caboclos* came back with an Indian tapper bearing water in hide bottles. The Indian stared in astonishment, then grinned. It was the primitive psychology of a savage amused at the sight of suffering. This white man had mule shoes nailed to his feet. He was a mule! The Indian giggled.

The girl turned on him in a rage and sent him packing. She sent her old *caboclo* for more water, then made some applications with rags torn from a poncho. It was like balm on Starr's feet. With the burning assuaged, he was able to talk and think more calmly.

"I'll know just which ones to fight before I'm through," he said deliberately. "Those rubber collectors would have listened to me—just as you said—if I'd had a gun. And your grandfather's going to listen to me before I'm through! Rubber can grow in this forest—high



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grade Para. I'm going to get it growing. But I've got something else to do first. I want to ask that overseer a few questions. And that waiter down at Porto Risco and a taximan, and those breeds who nailed these shoes on."

Clarissa's eyes were bright blue as she worked with the compresses. "So you're going to fight *all* of them!"

"Not all," he said simply. "I'll just fight two or three. I'm going to salt the rest."

THE man who came back with pliers was called Diniz, a grizzled, loose-muscled old *caboclo* with wide hips and short legs. He leaned over Starr, grunting as he untwisted the wires. He worked carefully, lest he unwind the strands the wrong way and thus cut deeper into the swollen flesh. Perhaps, because of the analogy of this operation to shoeing a horse, he turned his back, lifting Starr's leg up against his own stomach in the usual position of a blacksmith. Thus Starr was behind the fat hip of his liberator.

And the holstered gun was right there. It was not only within arm's reach; it was practically thrust into his face!

Starr waited until both of his feet were free from the tangle of wire and tattered canvas and iron mule-shoes, then he took the gun as if it had been handed to him butt foremost.

The old man spun around gasping an oath. Both of the *caboclos* were here now and one of them still had a gun. But he stood dumbfounded at the gesture of this man they had rescued.

"What is the meaning of such a thing!" old Diniz exploded. "*Senhorinha!* He has taken my gun! I free him of the mule-shoes and look—he has taken my gun!"

The other old man had turned to the *senhorinha* at the same moment as if waiting for her command. But to the astonishment of both, the girl said calmly, "It seems that he wants the gun, else he would not have taken it. I will give you a new one, Diniz."

Starr got up. Although his ankles were shaky he found he could stand. He could not walk very far barefooted in the jungle, but for those first few moments of freedom he enjoyed it. The moss and loam of the jungle earth were caressing. He limped up and down carefully at first, scarcely believing his power. He was like a paralyzed man who has thrown away crutches at some grotto of miracles. All three watched him, the girl smiling. Then as if there had been no interruption since her last words, she added, "And also, Diniz, he will need some boots. Yours will fit."

"My boots as well as my gun!" Diniz exclaimed.

"Your feet are bigger than Benedicto's," she said comparing the feet of her two servants. "But you can use Benedicto's horse."

"You are giving this stranger a horse as well as a gun?" old Benedicto cried. "Have you thought of this matter, *senhorinha*? The Don ordered this man to be gone. He is an enemy and a stranger to us all and yet you arm him."

"He is not a stranger to me," the girl said calmly.

"And *my* boots!" Diniz fumed as he took them off. He lifted one boot as if to throw it at Starr but thought better of it. Starr walked to him, picked the boots up, tied them together and slung them over the saddle. He would ride barefoot for a while he decided, a practice to which the rounded gaucho stirrups were well adapted.

"I left my basket back there in the brush," he said. "But before I get it, tell these good Samaritans I'm thanking them. I will pay them back. And I'm thanking you."

As he was about to mount, a rider came down the dark jungle trail whipping his pony to a pounding trot. As he checked it, it stood lathered and blowing, while the rider looked straight at Starr with a scowl that meant fight. He had a gun and his hand reached uncertainly for it, but held back. Evidently it was the sight of the barefooted Yank standing there with a gun in his own hand that made the man hesitate. Instead of drawing, he slipped from his saddle and ran to the girl.

She talked to the messenger, then to the two *caboclos*. Diniz pointed to his empty holster, jabbered wildly in Portuguese, pointed to Starr.

The girl shook her head, then turned and looked at Starr, from his mud-smeared Panama to his bare feet. She took a step toward him, stopped. "A message came to my grandfather from Porto Risco," she said. "A very strange message—and I don't believe it."

She stared at him hard. He was astonished at the transformation in the soft blue of her eyes. They seemed actually to darken to another color. Half to herself, she said, "Just who are you, I'd like to know?"

"You said you knew me well enough. I'm no stranger."

"But they say you robbed the Banco de Credito in town."

"Just what sort of trick are they playing now?"

"It's a mistake, of course." But she added anxiously, "You really are from the Rubber Development Corporation, aren't you?"

"What else do you think I am?"

"An impostor, they say, in the guise of a rubber technician."

Starr gave a mirthless laugh. "I suppose the overseer made that up."

"No. It's the police. They say you fooled even the port officer. And then you fooled the cashier at the *banco* before you—" She shook her head. "I don't believe it. You couldn't have killed anyone!"

And just who was it that I killed?"

"The cashier and then a *guarda* who saw you."

"Who else saw me?" Starr asked this, confident that he could be identified easily enough.

"No one."

"That's impossible!" Starr said with growing uneasiness. "What were the clerks and tellers doing?"

She gave a sudden laugh. "Why! That shows you weren't there. It's only a small branch *banco* with a cashier and one *secretaria* who was out on an errand." She looked back, still laughing, at the three men.

THEY were cowering together, watching fearfully. Although two of them were armed, it was obvious that they were afraid of this desperado, this bandit, or whatever they thought he was. The girl spoke to them in Portuguese. Although Starr could read and write the language he had difficulty understanding it when it was spoken in disjointed gasps. But he knew by the toss of the girl's head and her smile that she was scoffing at the whole preposterous story.

She turned to him. "They say there's no doubt of it. The *guarda* lived long enough to tell the police who you were. He said you showed him your credentials and letters. That's how you got in to the *caixeiro's* office."

"My credentials—and letters!" Starr said in a queer voice. "They were stolen when I was in that riverfront dive! Another Yank— at least that's what he said he was—stole them while I was changing my clothes! Can't you understand? This bandit you're talking about—he stole my letters!"

"And he's using them to pose as a rubber technician," the girl said eagerly. "Why of course! That explains it completely!" She said this directly to the three men.

But they shook their heads. "A very thin excuse, *senhorinha*. He is merely saying that someone else is the impostor and using his papers when it is the very thing he is doing himself."

"It's perfect nonsense!" the girl cried. "If he robbed the *banco* why would he come straight out here to see my grandfather?"

"To rob him—under the same guise," one of the men said.

"What are you talking about!" she snorted. "He didn't even have a gun!"

"Nor did he have one when he killed the cashier and the *guarda*. He did it silently with a knife."

The girl turned to Starr excitedly. "You had better come and explain it all to my grandfather." Then she added, "These men say you proved yourself guilty by stealing Diniz' gun. Perhaps you'd better give it back."

"Yes. Perhaps." Starr's lip curled. "But if I go to see your grandfather he might not believe me. In the first place he wouldn't want to believe me. He would be glad enough to see a Yankee proved a double-dyed villain. At least he'd throw me into jail until he had proof, wouldn't he?"

She nodded uncertainly.

Starr answered the nod. "No thanks! I'm not going to rot in one of your jails while I wait for someone from Belem to come a thousand miles to identify me. That would be the crowning insult!" He faced the three men. "I've had enough mud spattered on me. I've been kicked out of Clayburn's house. They've nailed mule-shoes on me and now you want me to go to jail! I'll not add *that* to my report when I go back to Belem!"

One of the men seemed to be impressed by the girl's point of view. There might be some mistake. This might be merely a professor from the Instituto Agranomico after all. Actually he looked more like a botanist than a bandit.

"If you are only the Senhor Starr you say you are," the man said, "well and good. You will come with us."

But Starr had his gun leveled. "Yes, well and good!" he said with a long-lipped grin. "You aren't afraid of me, if I'm Starr, are you? You'd just as soon have a shoot-out right now. But what if your first guess was right?"

The man had drawn his gun, but he holstered it again slowly. The other two men began to tremble at the lips. All three backed away to their horses.

Under her breath the girl said, "Of course you aren't the bandit. You just said that to frighten them away."

"I'm glad you at least believe in me—no matter what I say." He jumped to his pony before the three men could make up their minds what to do.

"But where are you going now?" the girl asked.

"To settle a few scores," he said, wheeling his pony into the brush.

"But aren't you going to settle this bandit nonsense first?" she called.

"That can wait."

CHAPTER IV

"BUT THIS TIME I'LL LIVE HIGH!"

AT SUNRISE Starr rode out of the jungle and stopped at a roadside booth on the outskirts of Clayburn's estate. His whites were stained with jungle grass for he had slept in them. His Panama was more like the tattered sombrero of a rubber hunter. He needed a shave. But these were only superficial changes in his appearance. There was something else about him that gave him an entirely different air

He no longer carried a basket of shoots under his arm. Instead, he carried a gun which, since he had no holster, he tucked buccaneer fashion into his belt. He had left his basket hidden in the brush back there where he had said goodbye to the girl. After that he had ridden back to hunt for those "blacksmiths." He had hunted until the *estradas* turned as dark as tunnels in the overhanging jungle growth, and then because of exhaustion as well as nightfall, he gave up. But now at dawn he could start again—provided he had something to eat first.

No one answered his repeated knocking. He went around to the shack in back of the booth, pounded loudly, calling, *"O de casa!"*

He came to the front of the booth again and this time with dawn breaking through the Amazonian mists, he saw a placard tacked on the padlocked boards of the store's front. He translated the sign easily enough:

WANTED!

HENRY BARTON STARR, ALIAS CORAZON. 5 FEET 11, BROWN HAIR, GRAY-BLUE EYES. BEST IDENTIFICATION: TATTOO MARK ON LEFT PALM—A BLUE HEART. AGE 25 TO 35. NORTH AMERICAN. SPEAKS SPANISH BUT LITTLE PORTUGUESE, FLUENT IN ENGLISH. LAST SEEN AT THE CLAYBURN MANSE 2 HOURS AFTER ROBBERY OF THE BANCO DE CREDITO DE PORTO RISCO. WANTED FOR MANY CRIMES IN THE ARGENTINE.

Although Starr had no tattoo mark in the palm of his hand that last sentence gave him something of a qualm. Evidently this man Corazon was a bandit of some importance—the sort of criminal that would be shot on sight.

It might be best, he decided, to get this mix-up in identity straightened out—at least with the *capitão do porto*. As for the public, let them think what they wanted to. But the authorities must get it straight. This Argentine bandit was, of course, the man who had come into Starr's booth at the saloon in Porto Risco, the man who had introduced himself as Bill O'Dea. The description fitted him perfectly—height, age, color of eyes and hair and his ability to "speak English fluently." O'Dea had passed himself off very easily as a man from the States. In fact there was the possibility that he actually was from the States—a gangster, perhaps, who had gone down to the Argentine and played *bandido*. In any case, it was going to be hard to convince the port officer that Starr and this fellow were two different men. He had to see that official without delay.

To arrange this interview was not as simple as Starr had hoped. There were complications even though he managed to get into the little iron-roofed office on Porto Risco's main pier easily enough. The dense equatorial jungle made that possible. Instead of riding through town he chose an *estrada* which led down to the river side. The jungle in all these river ports made a solid wall at the edge of the clearing where the town began, and here at Porto Risco the dense mass of silk-cotton trees and vines and orchids reached to within a few hundred yards of the main landing itself.

Two ocean-going freighters screened the port officer's shack from the view of *bogas* in their dug-outs and river boats further out in the stream. Even so, some of the stevedores and the deckhands on the ships saw Starr walking out to the pier after he had tethered his horse in the brush. Out of the corner of his eyes he noticed one man stop work and call to another. Without facing them he saw that they shook their heads. No one was looking for the bandit down here. Starr was just a man in ragged whites—an Amazon derelict. There were many Brazilians on the waterside dressed in whites. Besides, the bandit would not be walking straight into the office of the *capitão do porto!*

And that was just what Starr was doing. In other words he was on the same spot from which he had started yesterday. His unhappy visit to Porto Risco and to Clayburn's estate had begun right here at the immigration office where the port officer had looked over his credentials. He had no credentials this time, except what he held in his bare hand. Corazon's hand was marked with a tattoo in the left palm. And that was the only alibi Starr had!

The robbery and murders had been committed while he was in an oxcart on the way to the Clayburn manse, hence this was no real alibi at all. Unless by a miracle he could find that same oxcart and its driver. There were hundreds of wooden-wheeled oxcarts just like it, hundreds of Indians dressed in the same cotton blouse, and straw sombreros. He would have to fix the time. But the Indio could not speak English and he probably told time by the sun or by the macaws.

Starr thought of the driver of the rented car which had taken him until the gas ran out. But he had a reasonable premonition that the driver would not help him! The tattoo mark was his only hope.

He entered the office without knocking. A brown little man with a green eyeshade turned from his desk, gibbered something like a man trying to shake off a nightmare.

"I am looking for the port officer," Starr said.

"Yes, *senhor*, you are looking for the port officer." the man laughed wildly.

"Sit down. I'm not going to kill you."

"No, *senhor*. I mean yes. I am just the *deputado*—no, I'm not even that. I'm just the clerk." He sat down obediently, with his hands clasped and placed on the desk the way little

children sit at school when they are supposed to be at attention.

Starr had to state his errand several times before the *deputado* could gather his wits.

"Yes, I understand perfectly, *senhor*. You are looking for the port officer. He is looking for you, too. I mean to say—of course, not you. But he is looking for someone who went down the river in a steam tug. Not you, no, not by any means. For you are here as I see. Talking to me. Will you have a cigar?"

He fumbled in a can of cigars, pulled out three and handed them to Starr. Starr took one and the clerk struck a match, but his hand shook too violently. "I am sorry, *senhor*. Little shaky. Too many drinks. Will you have a drink?" He stumbled over his own chair lurching to a filing cabinet. He might have whipped out a gun from the cabinet, Starr realized, without much anxiety. But the *deputado* was trying no tricks. He produced a flask of sugar-cane brandy.

"You say he went down the river hunting for me? When will he be back?"

"Yes, *senhor*. You are right. I agree with you." The clerk shoved the glass of brandy across the desk. "Please drink, *senhor*. Thank you."

Starr repeated the question gently, like a man talking to a dull-witted child. "The port officer. Oh yes! he will be back any time," the clerk said. "He has gone down with an *esquadra* of the police, all the police in town. That is, almost all."

STARR sat down with his drink and his cigar. He noticed that the clerk was watching his hands as if at any moment it would snap up with a gun blazing. But it was the left hand, not the right, which intrigued him. He watched with a terrible fascination as if it were a snake and the clerk a bird in a nest.

Starr drummed with his fingers, glanced down at the back of his hand, grinning. There was a bad scratch on it made by some jungle thorn. He was about to turn his palm up and show the clerk that there was no tattoo there, when he noticed the sheet of paper on which he had been drumming. The typewritten, capitalized title caught his eyes.

HENRY B. STARR—CORAZON. Policia de informacão.

Evidently this was information upon which the police had been working and Starr considered it worth translating:

"CORAZON AZUL from the Argentine, 1942. *Contrabisto* and cardsharp in tent carnival concession, Buenos Aires. Originally from U.S. America. His henchmen, about 15 in number, Argentine *cosecheros*."

"What's a *cosechero?*"

"Of course you would not know," the clerk said, not sarcastically but eager to please. "They are what you call Okies in your country—Argentine Okies in this case. But these notes are of no special significance, *senhor*. I was commanded to type them out—"

Starr went on reading aloud:

It's the patented filter with its 66 mesh-screen baffles, that whirlcools the smoke—retains flakes and slugs—absorbs moisture—minimizes raw mouth and tongue bite. When filter is discolored, it has done its job. Discard it and put in a fresh one—costs only ONE CENT. Enjoy the benefits of Frank Medico Pipe, Cigarette and Cigar Holders.
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PAT'D BAFFLE SCREEN INTERIOR WITH "CELLOPHANE" EXTERIOR
10 for 10¢

"Committed many crimes with his band in Amazonas State since '42. Manãos, Codajaz, Fonte Boa and other river ports over which he exerted a fear-sway. Not heard of during last 2 years."

"So I'm supposed to be Corazon Azul—that's not Portuguese, is it? It's Spanish. "The Blue Heart'—in the palm of my hand." Starr looked up. There was one burning question that must be answered. "That *guarda* at the bank saw the credentials—my credentials—but he didn't see the blue heart. Otherwise he wouldn't have let the bandit into the cashier's office."

The clerk seemed glad enough to tell all he could. It was the right time to be confidential. "He saw the heart later, *senhor*, when he was killed. A knife in one hand—a heart in the other. That is how it was, he said as he was dying."

"Then that clears me!" Starr mumbled to himself. "Except—was that the *only* identification the *guarda* could give? He didn't know what Corazon looked like, of course."

"No one knows, *senhor*. Except for your—except for the one mark."

Again Starr looked down at his scratched hand. "I want to tell you something," he said finally. "You're just the clerk but you've got sense. Get this. I'm from the R.D.C. at Belem, I'm here to see that Clayburn's forests produce more rubber for America."

"That is my sentiment exactly, *senhor*." This time the clerk agreed not as a parrot, but fervently. "Brazil must give her ally rubber. I am in the government service. There must be more rubber."

"But there are certain underground forces who want to kick me out of town."

"Yes, naturally. No, no! I mean no!"

Starr went on talking half to himself as he tried to think it out. "The overseer doesn't want things changed because he'd be the first to lose his job. He's inefficient as well as crooked. Trees are strangled, blight kills whole stands of rubber, tappers work like the Indians in the seventeenth century, trees give a fourth the latex they could give."

"I agree with you. Will you have another drink?"

Starr was thinking hard. "Clayburn wants to kick me out because he's afraid there'll be no market for his increased production after the war. He's an old man and he hates any change and he hates Yankees."

The clerk still focused fiercely on the back of

"I won't tell anybody, ever in my life, for eternity senhor! *You were never in this office. I have seen nothing! I am blind! I am deaf forever!"*

Starr's hand, more eager than ever now, for the proof. Was there a heart in that palm, or was there not?

Starr dropped his hand in his lap and looked at his palm as though to answer the question for himself. No, there was no heart there. He could show his hand any time it suited his fancy. If the *policia* caught him and ordered him to put up his hands, the very gesture would prove that he was Henry Starr, not Corazon.

But he had proved it to no one yet. He could be either man by the flip of his hand. Yesterday he was Starr, the rubber technician who had come to get fine para from Thomas Clayburn's estate.

"If I were Corazon, a bandit and *contrabisto* with a gang of killers from the Argentine pampas to do my bidding—" he actually said this aloud—"if I went ashore here at Porto Risco from this very pier the way I did yesterday; if I went to the same places—not as Starr but as Corazon—to the restaurant, the *cantina*, out to the street corner to get a cab where yesterday I was spattered with mud—"

He became silent, thinking what he had to do. I've got to get rid of that overseer, so we can get rubber for the war. Even if I have to kill him—it's more important than myself or anything that happens to me.

He lifted his hand again, the clerk's eyes following it.

"You would like to see what I'm holding in the palm of my hand, wouldn't you? A trick card, perhaps, slipping down from my sleeve? Or else a sign branded into the skin?"

"No, *senhor!*" the clerk pleaded. "It is none of my affair."

"Yes, but suppose I show it to you? Then you can tell the port officer and the police and the whole town the truth."

"No, *senhor*. I agree with you—I mean I assure you. I won't tell anybody, ever in my life, for eternity. You were never in this office. I have seen nothing. I am blind! I am deaf forever!"

"Then I won't trouble your conscience with the secret," Starr said, picking a roll of waterproof muslin from his pocket—the muslin which he had to make bud patches.

"I've got a bad scratch here," he said. "Got to bandage it." He wound the muslin, taping it several times around his left hand over the back and under the palm—the way prize fighters tape their hands before putting on the gloves.

THE clerk exhaled an enormous sigh when he heard a knock at the door. Doubtless it was only some riverman or stevedore wanting to see the port officer, but his coming at this moment was propitious.

Simply to remind the clerk of his present duty, Starr loosened the gun in his belt. Then he got up softly from his chair, stepped back against the wall.

"Whoever it is," he whispered, "tell the port officer is busy."

Brushing his eyeshade up over his wet hair, the clerk gave a weak yap. At the second knock he yapped a little longer. So far as Starr could understand, the dismissal was bona fide, but fearing that the unnatural voice might have aroused suspicion, he peered through a window. He was relieved to see that it was only a peddler of plantation cigars and candy trudging off down the pier.

Before turning back to the desk, Starr noticed the WANTED sign tacked up next to the window. It was the same sign he had seen on the boarded-up booth on the jungle road. "Who printed this?"

"There is a printer in town, *senhor*, but he did not know what he was printing. He did it insensibly for emolument only. Has a family of twelve—"

"I want him to print another notice. I'll dictate to you and you put it in good Portuguese. And here—" He took out his wallet. "Here is the emolument."

The clerk reached fumblingly for pad and pencil.

"At the top in big letters put, 'Notice.'"

"*Annuncio*," the clerk said, writing. "Or *proclomação*—perhaps is better?"

"Yes. '*Proclamação* by Corazon.' Then have them print this: 'I am killing for Brazil and for my own flag.'"

"You said killing, *senhor*? Yes, I agree with you perfectly." The clerk wrote with difficulty because of the shake of his hand. Once again he reminded Starr of a schoolboy, his tongue sticking out of a corner of his mouth as he drew the letters.

"Paragraph two: 'All tappers are my friends except those who say *amanha* when I order a thing done.'

"Paragraph three: 'Certain individuals who object to my presence in this State must leave for Peru by the next boat, or they will leave with mule-shoes on their feet.'

"Mule-shoes, *senhor*!" The clerk breathed heavily. "Yes, I have it down. I agree."

"I have constituted myself the head of a band of guerrillas who are fighting against the enemies of Brazil. Whoever sabotages rubber production is an enemy whose days are numbered." Starr corrected himself. "Whose *hours* are numbered."

"Yes, that is better. Hours—*sim, sim*!"

"That's all," Starr concluded. "I want that tacked up everywhere you've tacked these other 'Wanted' signs, in the streets of Porto Risco and on the road to Clayburn's estate—everywhere. You can pay for the work out of this." He put bills for twenty *cruzeiros* on the table.

The clerk's eyes bulged. "This is a good *annuncio,* every word, but I do not understand why you do this—I mean why Corazon, a *bandido* from the United States—why should you—that is, what am I saying—"

"I've explained it right there. It's for *my* country and for Brazil. A bandit can turn patriot, I hope?"

The clerk tried to nod. But his head was also shaking sideways.

"Of course you understand what will happen to you if you don't have this done?" Starr added.

"Oh, of course I do! God forbid that I would not have it done! Within a few hours, three hours, two hours—according to the printer's disposition and the *moços* who will be sent out to tack the proclamation in conspicuous spots. Of course. Naturally."

Starr turned to go but the door opened at that moment and a policeman stood there panting as if from a good sprint. He could scarcely breathe. "You—Corazon!" He was an old man, a symphony in mahogany and silver—the mahogany was his skin, the silver his whiskers.

"Come in and don't get excited," Starr said quietly, his gun pointing at the puffing chest.

The policeman had not expected to find anyone in here except the clerk. That was obvious, since he had not even entered with a gun in his hand. He explained his coming, still laboring for breath. "A street vendor told me, I hope you understand—he came here just now and knocked. He said the clerk talked as if drugged. Nothing of consequence. No, not at all. But—"

"But now that you're here, you want to arrest me?"

"Well, no. That is—" The policeman stared at the gun bore. "Well, *senhor,* of course, my duty—that is, I can not very well arrest you when you have arrested me."

"I'm not keeping you," Starr laughed. "But if I let you go you'll call your chief and the rest of the force to come after me."

"No, *senhor,*" the old fellow protested. "They are on the river hunting you."

"Then you're the only police officer in town?"

"Oh, no—of course not!" the old man said quickly, realizing he had made a slip. "There is another at the station. He will do his duty. He is a very brave man. For that matter I was never considered anything but brave in my sixty years. But look at me!" He raised his palms with a helpless glance at the clerk.

"Then this other policeman," Starr said, "you can tell him what I'm telling you. I'm not on the river. I'm here. And that gang of gauchos who followed Corazon out of the Argentine—suppose I tell you that they're all right here in Porto Risco? Any stranger you see might be one of them—those *boga* oarsmen out there on the water, those rivermen on the landing, a bunch of drinkers in the saloons up the street—they're everywhere."

The old man nodded, his eyes huge. "I can understand, *senhor.* You have taken possession of us!"

Starr turned to the clerk. "Read him what you have written."

The policeman listened breathlessly as the clerk faltered through the *proclamação,* then he nodded, puzzled. "It is a good thing that is written, *senhor.* But is this possible that you have turned patriot? You are fighting—the enemies of Brazil! I do not understand such a thing."

"The enemies of Brazil will understand," Starr said. "Now you can go, *meu amigo.*"

"I! I can go!" the old fellow exclaimed. He looked at the door behind him, then at the clerk, then at Starr. Finally he gasped, "You do not even want my gun?"

"Of course not. Go back to your police station and make it clear. I won't be in town very long, just long enough to make two or three calls. If anyone tries to snipeshoot me, my gauchos will make you pay. But there will be no bloodshed unless—"

"There is no 'unless,' *senhor!* If you will give me that promise, I will give you mine. No one will molest you. There are women and children in this town. There must be no matter of bloodshed." Again he looked around to the door and back, unable to believe that he was free to go.

"If there's gun shooting, you'll have to start it," Starr said calmly.

"No. Not that, *senhor!* Nothing will be started."

Even though he turned and walked swiftly out on the pier, he was still convinced that he was going to get a slug between his shoulder blades. And it was rather a natural fear, for Starr had stepped out of the office and was following a few yards behind him.

As Starr walked ashore from the pier to the front street of Porto Risco, he experienced that curious feeling that comes to a man occasionally that he is reliving a scene forgotten and buried deep in his subconscious. In this case, it was no psychological quirk. It was the truth. Yesterday morning he had stepped off the landing and on to the front street of the little river town in this same manner. He had started out on an important mission that was to benefit this port and this whole countryside. And he had been received with kicks—from the very ones he wanted to help.

He was ashore now to go over the same paths, repeat the same scenes—the muddy street, the café and its waiter, the cab and its driver, the *cantina* and the fugitive O'Dea, his own countryman whom he had befriended, and finally the great manse in the Clayburn estancia. It was the kind of day that should be lived over again.

"But this time," he thought smiling, "I'll live high!"

CHAPTER V

CORAZON "HIMSELF"

STEVEDORES looked up from their work of loading Pará-nuts, fiber and cacao on the ocean going freighters, but they did not credit their eyes. This could not be the bandit Corazon. And if it were, there was nothing to be done about it. There was no one on that waterside who intended to be a hero. Let the policeman be the hero, that was his vocation.

Partly because of the *"amanha"* state of mind, partly because of the state of mind of any frontier town subject to the fear-sway of a bandit gang, no one molested Henry Starr. Word spread ahead of him very slowly. Nothing moves fast in Porto Risco, not even gossip. But by the time he had walked up to the palm-shaded *praça* a storekeeper came to the open end of his booth and gaped. A muleteer stopped and turned. A priest came to the door of the church garden. A taxicab jerked to a sudden stop with a shriek of brakes.

That was a good one! Starr chuckled. He had stood for just a moment at the same puddle where he had been spattered the day before. The puddle of course had dried up and caked with the equatorial sun at day's end, but the night drizzle of the Amazon had turned it into slimy red soup again. The cab had stopped just in time. The driver gulped, crossing himself. But much to Starr's disappointment it was not the same taxi man who had harangued him yesterday. That would have made it perfect!

People were running now. Some caught up with the old policeman who was well ahead of the bandit. They chattered at him as he kept walking faster and faster. More people came out of soft drink booths and saloons. It had all happened in the space of time it took Starr to walk from the pier to the café—a matter of perhaps three minutes. And in that short time no one could decide what to do. No snipers had time to get their weapons, even if there had been anyone to play that rôle. Starr walked into the café without being stopped or spoken to. On the contrary everyone got out of his way. That part of the street around the café was empty.

When he walked in, a busboy dropped a tray of empty dishes. Two waiters—there were only two in the establishment—tried to run out of the dining room, but Starr ordered them back. Some old Brazilian gentlemen having breakfast stood up without shoving back their chairs. Thus, for fear of making a noise, they could only half stand, and this gave them the permanent attitude of getting up but not moving.

The proprietor kneeling behind his cigar counter called voicelessly to the Indian busboy who managed to run out through the kitchen. The call meant of course that the busboy was to summon the police.

But this would take time.

Starr walked to a table, the two waiters backing away from him, both staring hypnotized at his taped hand. One of them stood with knees knocking, his hands clutching a tray with a pot of coffee, eggs, fruit. Starr grinned at him. It would be hard to forget that unshaven jaw. His jacket was clean this early in the morning and Starr considered ordering a tureen of soup to dump on it. But he had not come here for any such measly retaliation. He had more important matters to attend to. When he said, "I remember you!" the waiter stood nodding—the prolonged nod of an idiot.

"Please, sir, I didn't know you yesterday. Please, don't hurt me, sir!"

"I'm not going to hurt you. But I might kill you. Unless you tell me the truth."

"The truth, yes sir!" the waiter whimpered. His coffee pot jiggled, almost fell from the tray. "Now that I know who you are, sir, it's different. I won't hide anything—not from *you!* But we all thought you were a rubber technician—a terrible mistake!"

It was quite a convenient set-up, Starr discovered. This waiter would tell everything to "Corazon." He would tell secrets which no one else in town could have wrung from him!

Starr looked over his shoulder to where the Brazilian gentlemen had been crouching. But they had managed to slip out through the French window. In the opposite corner of the dining room the second waiter was trying to inch toward the pantry door. The old manager was still peeking over the rim of his cigar counter off there in the vestibule. Although the police had been sent for, there seemed to be no imminent interruption.

"Serve that breakfast," Starr pointed to the tray.

"Yes, sir! If you'll please sit here, sir. This is the best table—under the fan." The waiter set down his tray, brushed off the seat with his napkin, drew the chair up for his guest, brought flowers from another table and more flowers from a third.

"Pour some coffee."

"Yes, sir. And this cassava which is toasted with butter and plantains—"

Apparently this was the order for one of those guests in the corner, but that did not matter much, Starr was glad to see, for the guest had fled.

"Now stand still," Starr said, opening the eggs himself. "This rubber technician you mistook me for—you tried to get him into a fight

and now you'll tell me all about what happened!"

"Yes, sir. Him not you. Confidentially, sir, it was a put up job so he'd be kicked out of town before he went out to see Clayburn."

"Now we're getting somewhere!" Starr said as he ate. "Why didn't they want me—I mean this rubber technician—to go out to Clayburn's?"

The waiter squirmed as if the napkin were a knot around his hands from which he was trying to free himself. "I will be killed if I tell."

"You mean if you don't tell," Starr showed his taped fist. "Do you know what's in this?"

"Yes, sir," the waiter gulped. "There is a heart in your palm."

"You're wrong. It's the kick of a mule. If you're afraid to talk—"

"I'm not afraid, sir! I'm only afraid of you!" The blue jaw stood out against skin that was bloodless gray. "I'll talk. I'll tell everything!" His voice dropped to a tremulous croon. "Clayburn's overseer, you remember him, sir. He came in right after you did. He gave me orders. And a big tip. 'Get that fellow into a fight', says he, 'and I'll tend to the rest of it.'"

"And then he went out to the cab I'd engaged," Starr prompted. "I'm beginning to get it!"

"That's it, sir! And the other car spattered you—I've figured that out. The overseer must've told the driver to follow you and bump into you, or spatter you."

Starr grinned. "I don't think I'll kill you after all. You're too good a stoolpigeon."

The waiter tried to grin back but his lips were loose. "Yes, sir, a stoolpigeon, or anything you want me to do for you, sir. Count on me!"

"You're a damn crook."

"Sure. I'll do anything! Just try me out, sir."

"All right. You'll tell me one thing. Just why does the overseer object to a rubber technician going out to see Clayburn?"

"Clayburn hates Yankees. That's all the overseer told me. Honest to God, I don't know anything more."

"Clayburn's hatred for Yankees is only a cover. There's another reason. What is it?"

The waiter swallowed hard. "I don't know, sir! Please believe me! I'd tell if I knew, wouldn't I? I mean I'd tell *you*. All I know is, there's something happening out at the Clayburn estancia. But .I don't know what."

Well that was something! As an investigator and rubber technician Starr might have learned nothing, perhaps for months. But as Corazon he was going to learn everything, immediately, and from the very men who had tried to kick him out of town!

Feet were scurrying everywhere—in the kitchen, the vestibule, the veranda beyond the the French windows, the sidewalk. It might be unwise to sit here too long, Starr decided. He finished his eggs hurriedly.

"So something is happening out at Clayburn's," he said thoughtfully. "But what?"

"All I know, there's been much more rubber shipped and better rubber than they're shipping now. I'd tell you more if I knew it. I'm on your side, sir. Count on me. If you ever need my help, if I can ever give you a steer on a good job—"

"O.K. Give me one."

The waiter had to think this over. He thought faster when he saw that taped fist doubled. Here was a bandit, actually a bandit chief, on whom he had purposely spilled soup only yesterday! There was still some doubt about the pay-off.

"I'll tell you, sir—just to prove I'm your friend from now on." He leaned across the table, whispering. "On account of the robbery yesterday, the manager didn't bank his receipts last night. They're in a safe right here in the house."

"Where?"

"Under that big map on the wall behind the cigar counter!"

THE symphony in mahogany and silver stood in the vestibule. Behind the old policeman stood the whole café force—the proprietor, his wife, the gaucho cook, the Indian busboy and second waiter.

Starr was completely unperturbed. If this was an arrest, all he would have to do was to untape his hand and show his clean palm. He could masquerade as the dreaded Corazon for as long as he wanted—up to the very last moment of a crisis, and then show the proof under the tape. His hand held not the incriminating symbol but a passport to innocence. He waited affably to see what the policeman, now that he had been summoned, was going to do.

He could understand a little of the excited chattering. "Why had the policeman come alone?" That was the gist of the proprietor's frantic remarks. They had expected him to bring a posse. Hadn't he understood the message? Corazon the bandit was here in the restaurant—a turkey ready for the capture!

But the officer smoothed his silvery beard and to the consternation of everyone actually walked into the dining room alone!

"Is there trouble, *senhor*?"

"Not yet," Starr said.

"*Graças a Deus.* I am glad everything is peaceful." He turned to the proprietor and the group at the door. "Why did you call me? The *senhor* is making no trouble."

"Not if you remember our agreement, *meu amigo*," Starr put in.

"I am remembering. There must be no bloodshed. I am thinking of the women and chil-

dren in this town. I will keep my promise, if you keep yours."

He was about to go but seeing the proprietor's wife standing stiffly, backed against that map of the Amazon on the wall, he paused. Being a *guarda* he knew perhaps where the cash of this establishment was kept. He turned to Starr. "I have been forced into this armistice because of humanitarian reasons. Doubtless I will be discharged for my decision, but according to the *annuncio* you are having printed you have turned patriot. You are killing for Brazil. You want more rubber produced for the war. Our agreement gives you the freedom of this town but that does not mean you are free to commit any more robberies."

"Who's committing robberies? I could've robbed this joint if I wanted to. I even know where they keep their cash. But I didn't even ask for it."

"You say you know where—"

"Certainly. It's in a safe behind that map on the wall."

The proprietor's wife gave a half-scream, sank to a chair. Everyone gaped, including the old policeman. The proprietor exclaimed, "How, *senhor*, how did you—"

"How did I know? Because you've got a crook working for you. That rat over there! 'What's a little soup!' That's what he said yesterday and today he wants to be a bandit! Not in my gang!"

There was an awful silence as Starr walked out, and then a sudden outbreak of violence, of invective, of angry shrieks. The invective was not heaped on him but on the waiter. Doubtless he was getting lots more than a tureen of soup thrown at him!

A big crowd in the street waited to see what had happened to their reckless old policeman. He was being torn to pieces probably. The shrieks in there were awful; the slamming and the thudding, the jingle of crockery. But to the astonishment of the whole street, Corazon the bandit walked out casually while the brawl grew louder! There was only one answer—some of his henchmen were in there doing his murdering for him!

After all, it was beneath the dignity of a bandit chief to do the dirty work himself. The crowd saw him saunter, smiling, toward Thomé's Cantina. That was where he belonged—in a dive that catered to gamblers and rivermen and *contrabistos*. He had been there yesterday, some remembered, after a street argument with a cab driver. And there were some who noticed that the same driver had, only a few moments ago, left his cab and run into Thomé's.

The *cantina* was a surprising contrast to the fear-ridden café. There was an air of hilarity heightened by the phonograph's marimba and by the smell of rum.

Thomé Lavras who was his own bartender was a friend of river pirates and criminals who sought to lose themselves in the vast jungles of Amazonas State. When he saw Starr coming to the bar, he beamed and licked his lips with a smile. He smiled at the taped hand at which everyone in the *cantina* was staring.

There would be no reason to take that tape off in a place like this, Starr reflected. He could bask in glory here, the glory of a Robin Hood. Of course if he found himself cornered, if a dozen men popped up from behind the bars or tables leveling guns at him, he would have to whisk off the tape in the blink of an eye. There was always the possibility that he might be shot before he could show his hand.

But there was no crisis here. Thomé Lavras was the kind of saloon man who preferred to talk with bandits rather than fight them.

"*Bom dia, amigo.* This is an honor! You will have a drink with me? Of course, many drinks, any time you come. You are at home!"

STARR studied the situation before answering. Several drinkers had stampeded down the hall of the booths and out the back door. One or two hard-looking river natives stayed at the bar but gave the guest a wide berth. The percentage girls were not on duty at this early hour, but they poked their heads from side doors, their hair in curlers. They ducked quickly, miraculously changed from pink wrappers to spangled dresses. The Cuban *mulatica* was the first one to come out, then came a girl who had been kicked out of the Canal Zone. They knew these renegades of the Amazon. They were men who spent money, especially if—to use a North American phrase—they were "hot." And this one, they had heard, had a band of horse thieves from the Argentine following him. He was a heaven-sent gift to any percentage girl.

Starr faced the *cantina* owner across the bar. "You seem to know who I am."

"Very well, *senhor*. You came in here yesterday and you went to a booth in back and changed your clothes."

"Are you sure I'm the one?"

"Why yes, *senhor*. How could I make a mistake? I never forget a face in my business."

"Then you remember there was another man—a Yankee about my size? He had a suit spattered with mud the same as mine."

"Vaguely, yes. But there was a crowd here. I do not have eyes in the back of my head. But you—I could not forget you, *senhor!*"

This sounded plausible. The real bandit, O'Dea alias Corazon, had probably slipped into this *cantina* and back to the hall, making himself as inconspicuous as possible.

"Corazon came in here yesterday," Starr said. "But you did not see him. Are you sticking to that?"

"Of course, *amigo!* I never saw Corazon in my life. I will stick to that under torture! How could I run this establishment if I ever betrayed one of my customers? I tell the police, I get a reward of a few *contos,* and then—swoosh! My throat is cut by the friend of the one I betray."

A loud speaker phonograph imported from the States ground out a catchy Chileanette, changed discs and ground a bolero. Thomé uncorking champagne, actually hummed.

"Here is your drink, *amigo,*" he said. "We're all one big family here. The Amazon is a refuge for gentlemen like you from all over the world. And they all say, 'If you want a hiding-place, or a passport arranged, or a concession, go to old Thomé!' That's me!" He held out the bubbling glass.

"Thanks, but I'm not drinking," Starr said, peering around to every corner of the *cantina.* "I came in here to settle a score." That was not quite accurate. He was here to stimulate rubber production for the States. He was not masquerading for fun, but for a definite purpose. That cab driver who had sassed him yesterday might, under the duress of fear, divulge some more valuable information. That is to say, he would divulge it, not to Starr, but to Corazon.

At a table in the corner a man sat facing the wall, stiff as a dummy. He must have been caught there, unable to dive for one of the booths when Starr entered. He was a sorry, petrified wretch, like a rabbit congealing before the swoop of the hawk. But Starr could see his silhouette in the bar mirror. It was the cab man.

The bartender saw Starr's eyes, followed them to the miserable thing in the corner. "I understand, *amigo.* To settle a score. Yes, of course—your score with that pig of a cab driver who was impolite to you yesterday. I even heard him out there in the street. 'Why don't you get a pushcart?' That's what he said, I heard distinctly. The whole street could hear his unfortunate observation! Well, there he is—the son of two pigs. Whatever you do, it is all right with me, *amigo!*"

Starr did not have to do anything. It was the cab driver who did it. He got up, as if pulled by a string, then turned stiffly and walked toward Starr. His palsied hand touched his cap in a salute, then he took the cap off and wrung it. "Sir, if you will only let me tell you something—before you—" His wits scattered in fright, he broke down, his knees wobbly. He reached to the bar to support himself.

"Better take this," Thomé said sympathetically, shoving him a shot of rum.

Luckily one of the *cantina* girls had sidled up to the bar and she was pinning a flower on the lapel of the bandit's tattered jacket. "This for you, pretty boy." The bartender snapped something at her in his own lingo. It was too idiomatic for Starr to understand, but it seemed to mean, "Get the hell out of here!"

The girl turned away in the rhythm of the phonograph's *danzon congo* snapping her fingers, crooning. It gave the cab driver a new lease on life. He started tearing at his cap. "If you will only let me talk, please, sir, you'll be glad to hear what I tell you before—before you—" Again he was unable to get the terrible words out.

"Before I kill you," Starr prompted. "It's a good offer—if you make it worth my while. It's got to be good, whatever it is you're going to tell me—good enough to save your life."

"It will be, believe me, sir—but—it's something I must tell you alone."

"Get in that booth."

ANOTHER girl made her offering as Starr was on his way to the booth behind the cab driver. She handed him a cigar and lit it for him. "My name is Conchita, *meu amigo.* Always remember me when you come to Porto Risco."

"Better stay out of the way," Starr laughed. "Better get out of this *cantina* before the smoke starts."

The cab driver jumped as if knifed in the back, but kept walking, then turned into the booth—a beef led to the slaughter pen. He stood in front of Starr who sprawled to a seat.

"It was Clayburn's overseer who told me to—"

"I know all that," Starr interrupted. "Get to your point."

"It's just this, sir. I thought maybe you'd like to pick up some good money. Not just one bunch, but a lot of it, paid to you regular. I can't just blackmail the overseer myself. He'd have me shot. But you—you know the business."

"Blackmail isn't my business," Starr said, squinting through cigar smoke. "The overseer hasn't long to live anyway. He's on my list. Unless—just what have you got on him?"

"Enough so he'll pay you whatever you ask, and keep on paying you, with no end to it!"

"If it's that good, why are you telling me?"

"I'm telling you so I can live, isn't that a good enough reason? Besides," he went on in feverish excitement, "I don't want you to kill the overseer. It'd be killing the goose with the eggs. I'm telling you this so you'll let him live, same as me."

"That's two good reasons," Starr admitted.

"The overseer's been getting big chunks of money that don't belong to him. Maybe he's stealing it, maybe somebody's bribing him. He's afraid to deposit it here in town so he takes it down to Santarem, investing it in the rubber boom, through a *banco* down there.

The cashier here gets wind of it, having connection with the Santarem bankers."

Starr listened intently. But above the rhythm of a bolero he heard someone walking down the hall. It was one of the *cantina* girls, but as soon as she reached the booth, the cab driver snarled at her to keep away. She gave her message however. Thomé wanted to see the *senhor*. It was important.

"I'll see him in a few minutes," Starr said, then turned to the cab man. "All right. Go on."

"The cashier of the *banco* asks the overseer, 'Where'd you get all this money?' He got it in a lottery, the overseer says. And that's where I come in. I got a side line selling lottery tickets same as many taxi drivers. The overseer pretends I sold him the winning number. The cashier checks with me and I back my friend up. But these cashiers in the *bancos* know all about who wins the State lotteries. He calls us both crooks and says he's going to do some more investigating."

"Then he gets bumped of," Starr said thoughtfully.

"Sure! *You* bumped him off. In the nick of time you save the overseer's neck!"

Starr was very much impressed. He was delighted. This being a bandit was not only a thrilling experience, it was solving many problems. But he had a premonition that his life as Corazon was not to be all roses when he heard the bartender coming down the narrow hall of booths. Thomé paused behind the rattan curtain and said in a soft voice, "*Senhor!* If you please! Can I speak to you?"

Star nodded. "Sit down. We're all one big family."

"There is a *cosechero* out there. A stranger from the Argentine pampas there is no doubt. He is asking for you. Right away I surmise this is one of your men!"

Thomé Lavras and the cab driver must have noticed the queer look on Starr's face. "One of my men!" he repeated vaguely.

"You have your men posted all over town, that is my understanding," the *cantina* owner said, "but I did not dare to admit that you are here. I said, no, but then I thought I have made a mistake. Your man asking for you—I should not lie to him. I said, wait and I shall see if Corazon is here. Now what's to be done?"

Starr would have been very happy to know the answer. What *was* to be done! Here was one of the henchmen of the real chief, Corazon. It was reasonable to suppose that he had come to find out what this masquerade was all about. He might expose Starr as a fraud. He might object to this assumption of a bandit's power. Perhaps he had not come to expose him, but to kill him.

"Are you sure it is one of my men?" Starr asked to gain time.

"Naturally he did not say so. But he was here yesterday when you came in to this same booth to change your clothes. I knew beyond doubt that he was a *cosechero* but I said nothing then. Being a *cosechero* means nothing but this man is of a type—a fanatic light in his eyes, shall I say—at the best, a dangerous man."

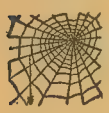
"Go back and tell him I'm not here."

"But he knows you are here!"

He was a gaucho wearing bombachos *and smelled of camp-fires, sugarcane rum and horse sweat.*

"You heard me!" Starr said desperately.

But Corazon's henchman was already walking down the hall toward the booth.



THE *cosechero* spoke Spanish of course, but it was his fluency in English that equipped him for his present work. Starr guessed that he had been sent back here to Porto Risco as a spy for the Corazon gang. He was a burned, brown gaucho wearing that type of bloomers they call *bombachos,* with a belt as broad as the cinch of a horse. He smelled of camp fires, of sugarcane rum and of horse sweat. And his eyes were certainly of a fanatical red.

"What is it that this thing is, *hombre?*"

It was his Spanish idiom for asking, "What's your game?" He asked it after Starr had dismissed the cantina owner and the cab man and the curtain was drawn.

Starr puffed fast at his cigar. "I'll tell you if you tell me. Are you one of Corazon's men?"

"You will tell me without any ifs. Everyone in town thinks that you are the Corazon. A *mulatica* out there told me the same. She said, 'Yes, Corazon is here'. What is it that this means?"

He would find out easily enough, Starr reflected, when those placards were printed and tacked up all over town. For the present, the simpler explanation must suffice.

"My credentials were stolen. The cashier at the *banco* was killed—not for robbery, but for another reason I am just beginning to suspect. I am blamed for it."

"Then why is it that the old *sergento* of police did not arrest you when you went into the café?"

"Why because—you see—" Starr groped for an answer. "You see, he knows I'm innocent." It was a credible lie, except that this gaucho from the pampas happened also to be from Missouri.

"Then why," he asked, knitting his Luis Firpo brows, "why is the old policeman telling everyone that you are Corazon, and that there will be a massacre if anyone molests you?"

Starr was cornered utterly. "Maybe you can tell me."

"Yes, I can tell you. The policeman thinks you are Corazon because you told him so! You are telling everyone. You are posing as someone you are not!"

Starr bulled his luck. "All right. Corazon is posing as me. Who's objecting?"

"Then I understand it, *hombre.* You are changing places with my—you are changing places with Corazon."

"It's his idea, not mine."

"*Bueno.*"

Starr noticed that the word had been said with considerable satisfaction. It gave him something of a qualm. It sounded like a whole statement of fact, not merely an exclamation. It said, "*Bueno.* You are the hunted bandit now. My maestro Corazon is free. You are taking his guilt upon yourself—the guilt of all the past years as well as the present."

"If you see Corazon," Starr said, "tell him I'm not objecting. Or did you come in here to make some objections yourself?"

Slowly the gaucho shook his head. "Whatever the reason you have for this trick, it will not work. Corazon is easily known by a mark." He looked at Starr's hand which held the cigar. It was his left hand for the right might be needed for another purpose. The gaucho gaped—a sort of breathless growl deep in his throat. "Your hand! You have taped your hand!"

"It's nothing. A jungle plant tore it—just a scratch."

The man gave a fierce smile. "Your trick is well played. Why should I object? You will be hounded, not he. You will pay for his deeds, so how could any of us object? But look, *hombre.* If you are going to be a bandit, can you shoot a gun?"

It was the second time since arriving at Porto Risco that Starr had been asked that question. He gave something of the same answer. "I'm from the States like Corazon himself. You ought to know how we Yankees shoot."

"Corazon is a gifted marksman. How can you pretend, just because you are from the same country, you can impersonate a famous expert? If you had to kill me, for example, you would show right away that you are not Corazon at all, but an impostor."

"But I don't have to kill you," Starr said blandly.

"Let us say you do. Let us say I am going to kill you and you must protect yourself. Go ahead! Let me see you do it!"

"Do what?" Starr asked dumfounded.

"Draw your gun as if to kill me."

Starr said lamely, "Well, I'd just do it like this." He drew his gun but another gun struck his as he lifted it and he found himself sitting back with a muzzle a few inches from his chest.

The gaucho burst out in a jeer. "An impostor! Perhaps you can shoot—with the dispatch of the average *norteamericano,* yes. But you draw as if making a speech. And your speech says plainly, 'I am not a *bandido* but a rubber technician! I am a hoax.'"

Starr said, staring at the gun bore, "All right. It's your turn. What's your next play?"

"You have let Porto Risco think you are Corazon. So if you are dead, there will be no further search for him. His crimes dies with you. Is that a sensible game, *hombre?*"

"Fairly sensible," Starr said, his eyes seeing double. "Except if you kill me they will examine my body. They will take off this tape." He held up his hand. "I can prove my innocence

even when I'm dead because there is no tattoo."

He saw the short black barrel, its bore like a glinting eye that shifted its gaze. The shift revealed an indecision. Starr went on tensely, "If I'm alive and if I line out for the jungle it will give your master that much longer to escape."

The thumb relaxed on the gun butt as the man muttered to himself, "If you will escape to the jungle and the police search for you, and if they follow you—" He nodded slowly. "It is what you call in your country, the wild goose."

"A herring on the trail is more like it," Starr suggested.

"To be sure, the smell of the trail is lost in the smell of the fish. There is something to be said for your offer. Yes, I see it is good."

He could not help seeing it. Anyone could have seen it. Starr was offering to carry the crimes of Corazon on his own shoulders away to the jungle. The gaucho's eyes were burning, inspired—as if this inspiration were his own. "So! You would like being a *bandido* all your life?"

That was not exactly what Starr had thought of, but he said, "It has its bright side. A girl gave me this cigar, another gave me flowers."

"*Bueno!* I will tell everyone. I will tell Corazon himself, and he will tell his men. They will spread it around that you are just what you want to be. But if you agree to this, *hombre,* do not think it will be so easy to change your mind."

Starr had a feeling that he was entering into a compact with the devil. But there was always that card up his sleeve, or rather in his hand where a crooked gambler will "palm" an ace or two. And he could show the ace anytime he wanted, and instantly turn back into Henry Barton Starr.

"I'll agree," he said.

"*Por dios!* You are a brave man!" the gaucho laughed. "Which reminds me—your gun." He thought this point over, then shrugged. "Keep your gun. I do not think you will make the mistake again of drawing on me. You will do the wise thing. You will go out to the street now and escape from the town. If you do that, I give you your life." It was a command rather than an offer of freedom. "This thing of the fish on the trail, it is a good answer. But I must follow to see which trail you take."

"That's fair enough." Starr got up.

"To the bar first for the drink," the gaucho commanded. "It need not be known that you are obeying my orders. I will follow at a distance when we are in the street."

At the bar the gaucho slapped down a *conto* and thumped with his fist. "A drink for everyone in this *posada!*" he announced, waving to the cantina girls and the group of men at each end of the bar.

Thomé Lavras, beaming with delight, filled the rows of glasses.

The gaucho held his glass up and for the first time Starr was called outright by his new name. "Everyone will drink—and look with your eyes at your *jefe!* For you are looking at Corazon himself!"

CHAPTER VI

THE BLUE HEART

A *CRIOLLO* pony dozed at the trough in front of Thomé's Cantina. The gaucho mounted, lit a black cigar, puffed and watched the line of anxious faces on the opposite sidewalk. He waited until a man in torn, grass-stained whites came out of Thomé's and sauntered down the street toward the river front. Then the gaucho pressed his pony into a slow walk, following.

All of Porto Risco surmised easily enough that these two were Corazon and one of his *cosechero* killers. They did nothing but stare, and—as far as the Indio chicle hunters and charcoal burners were concerned—worship.

Down at the waterside Starr turned off into a dark *estrada* leading into the jungle wall, found his tethered pony, tightened the cinch and rode.

He did not go straight to Clayburn's manse. He had a little matter to attend to first. Although it was not so important as the interview he intended to have with Thomas Clayburn's overseer, it was definitely in line with his work.

Followed by the gaucho he took a road shaded by balsa trees and giant orchids until he came to the avenue of palms. Here he branched off.

He remembered the road through the Hevea stand very well. There were few roads constructed solely for the rubber hunters, and the path to the scene of the mule shoeing had no forks or crossings. He went straight there.

First he found his basket of buddings, spent some time examining the precious sticks. He knew every one of them—the length of each, the amount of sap, the greenness, the moisture, the health. The record in his mind was like a chart a nurse keeps on the temperature and heart beats of her patient. He was like a father who has found his starving children lost in the forest.

A little farther on he came to the embers of a fire which he remembered, and the forsaken shack and the clearing. At a crackle in the brush he whirled around, his gun in his hand.

A straw hat poked up, ducked, then as Starr walked toward the brush an old *caboclo* jumped like an animal breaking from cover. Starr leaped to his horse and followed.

The man tried to dive into the ferns but as the horse ran him down he lay there, panting,

more than ever like a wild animal run down by the hounds.

"Amigo!" Starr said, dismounting. In broken Portuguese he explained that he was not going to hurt him. He recognized the man as one of those who had looked on passively during the mule-shoeing yesterday. "Where are the others?"

The *seringueiro* shook his head.

"Where's your partner?"

This time the man pointed into the brush behind him. It was natural enough that he had tried to rejoin his partner when he attempted to run.

Starr pressed his pony into the brush where the second *seringueiro* of the pair was flattened on his stomach. Ordering them both out on the open estrada Starr said, "Take me to where there are others—not the *capitaz,* just the collectors."

The two men trudged ahead, Starr riding with his basket slung on his arm. It was yesterday all over again. But there was a difference. There would be no jungle Indios to bother him with mule-shoes. At least not yet. They went a mile further into the forest where they came on another team of rubber tappers. The two men on foot reached them first and doubtless explained to them that there was no use trying to flee. One of the new team could speak enough English to understand Starr's further orders and interpret them.

"Four of you are enough," Starr began. "You can tell all the other tappers in this stand."

They nodded and kept their heads bowed respectfully. They held their sombreros of *macilento* straw humbly over their chests as if Starr were leading them in prayer.

Starr said to the interpreter, "Ask them if they know who I am."

They nodded again, one of them pointing to Starr's taped hand. "We all know, *senhor.* You are the one with the heart in the hand."

"Now that we've got that straight, you'll listen. I told you yesterday what was to be done with these sticks. I showed you how to make a bud patch. You are to make a patch on all these saplings—" Starr's wave took in all that could be seen of the jungle around them. "You can cut many slivers from each stick and there are many sticks. You are to get all the other tappers and start to work. Not *amanha,* but now!"

They shook their heads. "No, not *amanha,* but *hoje!*"

"When I come back this evening there will be a bud patch on every sapling in this stand, taped with muslin like this—" He held up his taped hand. "If not—"

But they understood. Three of the *seringueiros* went to work instantly, the fourth scurried off into the forest to spread the news. Starr gathered his reins and was about to turn the pony to the trail when he saw a face framed in the ferns and orchids grinning at him.

The gaucho, a sort of Nemesis, had caught up with him. "You make strange use of your masquerade, *hombre.*"

"I haven't turned into Corazon for the fun of it," Starr explained readily. "I've got a big job to do. Does Corazon object to these jungles producing more rubber?"

The gaucho, instead of answering, asked another question. "Where are you going now?"

"To find some more tappers and get more rubber growing. Go ahead and call the police. The herring's across the trail."

"You mean you will let the police take you?"

"Why not? If they give me just two seconds to take this tape from my hand they will find they've chased the wrong man."

The gaucho had to think this over. And he thought quite logically. *"Bueno.* From now on I care little where you go. If you ride off into the jungle and hide, so much the better. It will take the police that much longer hunting for you instead of for Corazon. They will find out from these rubber tappers what you were doing here and which trail you took." Then, with what seemed complete, childlike frankness, he added, "So I will ride back to Porto Risco and inform them of this thing that has happened. Go with God, *hombre.*"

"Adios," Starr repeated, preferring the Spanish version.

The gaucho turned and rode off into the green shadows at an easy jog. Starr rode on in the opposite direction for perhaps a mile when a sharp light winked in the green and a slug hit his pony somewhere. Starr could not tell where, but he knew that the pony was plunging heavily. As the birds screamed in the trees another slug whined. This one went through Starr's hat, slugging him.

When he came to he thought, bewildered, that the gaucho had not stuck to the rules of logic.

THERE was something troubling Starr's conscience. It had started to trouble him, he remembered vaguely, while he lay there coming slowly out of a limbo of sleep. And now as he stared upward into the deep green he untangled the puzzle somewhat, despite the throbbing and banging in his skull.

He had to get his bearings first. He was lying on soft moss, while red and yellow birds studied him. A dead pony lay not far away and some of the larger birds, black ones, were watching it, flopping closer until they saw the prone man. Then they flopped off again, running along the ground as urubu vultures do before they can take off in flight. Starr was still uncertain where he was because of the high ferns.

Some of the ferns he noticed, looked exactly like the tails of birds so that he seemed to be surrounded by birds of every kind, moving and scrambling in a perpetual vibration of air. The air was something that could not only be seen and felt, it could also be heard. The sound rose and fell in time to the rhythm inside his skull.

He licked his dry lips, wondering why he had such a thirst. His mouth tasted as if he had been on a good drinking bout the night before. Too much champagne, he thought. But he had taken only one glass of champagne when the crowd in Thomé's Cantina drank to the glory of Corazon. So this hangover had some other cause.

It was from that slug perhaps. He had never known precisely how it feels to come out of a bad knock-out, but he knew the sensation of coming out of ether. A terrible sickness, a dizziness, a thirst, and a slaphappy feeling toward the world in general. And also an uninterrupted flow of talking and jabbering and swearing.

He had a faint notion that someone had poured a drink between his lips, bringing him to for a moment. But then everything had gone black again. This, come to think of it, had happened several times. It was during those waking spells that his conscience had started pricking.

He had committed a crime somehow, somewhere. Perhaps many crimes. He had a gang of *cosecheros* from the Argentine who were his henchmen and they killed and robbed and terrorized the little ports high up the Amazon. That was what was troubling him.

But then he remembered he had only pretended to be a *bandido* chief. "I wasn't really one!" he said aloud to the parrots and urubus. And yet there was some guilt.

"Now I have it! By pretending I was a bandit I helped the real one escape. That was a crime. I bandaged my hand so everyone would think I had a heart tattoed in the palm. I shouldn't have done that!"

The palm was itching from the memory of his trick. He scratched it and then rubbed it on his thigh. He rubbed his forehead with it for the pain in his head was as bad as his conscience prickling his palm.

He got up and stood groggily on his feet. His headache drummed repeated blows and a dizziness whirled him around and around until he clung to a tree. Then once again he felt the smarting of guilt in his palm.

He remembered reading a story once about a clergyman who was so mentally upset about a scarlet letter worn by a woman that the letter began to appear on his own breast. The letter was a badge of shame sewed on the woman's dress, but his punishment was more just: It came out as a rash on his own flesh.

That was what Henry Starr felt burning in his hand. He felt as if the badge—the heart—were engraved in his palm! Vividly he lived over his meeting with the gaucho, their talk, their bargain—"the compact with the Devil!"

"Damned nonsense!" he grunted as the parrots laughed at him. "I'm going nuts." That slug had hit him pretty hard, he realized. He could feel the welt on his scalp. "Got to get a drink of water somewhere, then I can think straight."

He walked a furlong or so, not knowing which direction he was taking. He tried to orient himself by the sun beyond that intertwined roof of vines and branches and orchids above him. To his surprise he found the brightest spot far down toward the unseen horizon. It confused him for he had lost all sense of time. He had thought it was about noon. Not until now did he look at his watch. It was five o'clock.

"That explains a thing or two. I've been lying unconscious for five hours!"

He felt better as he walked. And he was able to think more clearly. That stuff about the scarlet letter appearing on a man's skin, because of his conscience—that was fiction. But then he remembered cases in actual fact of this strange thing they call stigmata, red specks produced by nervous influence as in hysteria or mental ecstasy. He thought of an instance, not long ago, of a peasant girl in Europe who periodically revealed the wounds of the crucifixion on her palms.

Starr was about to rip off the bandage to convince himself that he was dreaming, when the birds began to chatter and whistle to each other and flutter off into the green shadows. They were frightened by that clipclop of horses' hoofs not far away.

Although he had no especial reason to be afraid, Starr dove into the brush. He might have caught something of the panic of the birds with whom he had been conversing in his half-mad way for hours.

From his hiding place which was the dense screen of bushrope and ferns, he saw the posse questing along the jungle path.

An *esquadra* of police, besides another half dozen armed riders including the port officer rode out to the clearing. He was not surprised to see them. He had been expecting them to come for him any moment, and that might have been the reason for his strange sense of guilt, materialized in his itching palm. The only point that puzzled him was the time it had taken the gaucho to put them on his trail. This suggested a grimly humorous possibility: the gaucho might have had trouble finding anyone in Porto Risco who was willing to come on this manhunt! The port officer and most of the police, Starr remembered, had been out of town searching for Corazon on the river.

At any rate it must have been a matter of

several hours before the posse had started to ride.

When they saw the dead pony several of them dismounted, came to the carcass and examined the saddle, bridle and brand. There was an excited palaver, some of the riders starting to quest through the brush. Starr could hear them all around him, jumping their ponies through the ferns, dismounting and leading them through the traps of bush-rope. One or two almost stumbled over him as he crouched there under a mat of vines between two moss-grown tree boles. But they needed bloodhounds in that kind of a jungle.

The excitement of being hunted got Starr's heart thumping even though it was not a matter of life or death. He did not intend to give himself up unless they found him. He had a definite antipathy for South American jails, and that was where he might land—even though he proved his innocence by showing them the palm of his hand.

"It'll be a good joke on them!" he thought to himself. "I'm not their man, and I can prove it. I'm Henry Starr. I've told no one I'm Corazon. Yes, they drank to Corazon at Thomé's Cantina, but I didn't tell them they were drinking to me! I just drank with them and laughed. All a joke. And that manifesto I had printed, it wasn't signed by me. But I'll even admit I wrote it and tell why! I'm getting rubber for Brazil as well as for my own country. It's for the war. And I'll explain this bandage on my hand—a scratch by a thorn."

It occurred to him all of a sudden that it might have been that thorn-scratch, infected now, that was burning his hand. It was not his conscience at all.

They were beating the brush so close to him now that he decided to be ready. He would lift his hand up and show it before exposing himself, lest they go on the principle that a *bandido* like Corazon must be shot at sight.

He unwound the bandage.

The blisters that itched him might have been made by the caustic juices of cashew nut—a method of tattooing of these Amazon Indians. Or perhaps even a regular tattooist's needle with blue ink might have pricked that symbol in his palm.

But there it was. He stared at it—and without any sudden astonishment for he had had a conviction right along that it was there.

The tattoo was in the shape of a heart indelibly graven into his palm.

THE Clayburn manse was in turmoil. Starr could easily imagine the apprehension of the household when they heard that "Corazon" had been tracked by the posse almost to the very gates of the compound. They must have heard about everything that had happened since morning—the fugitive's strange visit to the port officer's shack on the waterfront, his walk to the *praça* in broad daylight, the incident at the café, then the *cantina*, then his flight to the jungle.

Clayburn and his granddaughter and the *senhora* and the servants had also heard much more terrifying news. The fugitive had come to the stands of rubber and threatened the rubber tappers with death if they did not obey his commands.

Right now the tappers were making bud patches on all the saplings, carrying out his orders to the letter. For he was still at large, roaming the forests.

The last sign they had of the trail he was taking was the report of the posse. His rustled pony had been found dead and lying in one of the rubber *estradas*. But the bandit at nightfall had slipped away.

Starr had succeeded in slipping away purely because of the density of the Amazon jungle. Lying between two tree boles, covered with creepers as safely as if in a cocoon, he was unseen even though one of the searchers passed within arm's reach of him. Another had actually stepped over him, scrambling from one tree bole to the next.

Starr was delighted that the gaucho had not taken his gun. He even examined the weapon scarcely believing his eyes when he found it loaded. Possibly the gaucho had hoped that he would make the mistake of trying a shoot-out with the posse, thus incriminating himself further.

But he did not try a shoot-out. He lay there in almost total darkness except where a ray of sunset light shot through the ferns. He held his palm up so that the ray lit it. He stared at it in dumb rage. This brand in his palm was the written compact with the Devil. He had changed from Henry Starr to the bandit Corazon and now he would never be able to change back again.

This was how he felt when he met a charcoal burner and appropriated his donkey. He paid for the donkey and the owner knelt, bared his head, and said something in Portuguese which sounded like, "I kiss the hand and the heart. Go with God!"

It was the obeisance due to the man that Starr was—that is to say, the bandit who was good to the poor and killed only rich men in *bancos*. Starr had the feeling that he was not masquerading any longer. He was not a hoax. He was the real thing! It was an obsession which rode him hard when he walked up the steps of the Clayburn gallery.

Of course they were on the watch for him. Not only the *seringueiros* but the port officer and his posse had warned Clayburn that the bandit for some crazy reason was still interested in his rubber. He must be crazy, for a

bandit can not very well steal rubber from an *estancia.* Corazon had turned into a madman.

Negroes had been set on guard duty on the gallery, at the porte-côchère and in the one-room belvedere on the roof. In the adobe chapel beyond the plantation workers' huts, a bell began to toll.

There was wild scurrying back there as if the bell had announced a great event—a fire or a revolution or a battle won. But here in front of the manse there was a deathly quiet, for the servants on the gallery had fled. For a moment Starr was alone.

It was the gray haired *Don* himself—Thomas Clayburn—who appeared at the door in his wheel chair with a frog-eyed, wool-topped servant behind him.

Too proud to show the slightest fear, Clayburn said coolly, "You want to see me, I reckon?"

"No. I'm in a bad jam but I don't think you'd be the one to help me out. I came to clear myself and tell the whole truth to the one person who believes me—your granddaughter."

To Starr's surprise Clayburn took this very calmly. He sat there gray and motionless as a rock, his only excitement revealed in the scowling eyes. "I understand that. My granddaughter believes you are not what they all think you are. She believes your credentials were stolen, and she has almost convinced me. But—"

"But you don't want to be convinced," Starr said, thinking of those armed servants posted everywhere, and of that tolling bell.

Clayburn shook his head. "I was about to say something else. You may be innocent, but what is this?" He unflipped a paper from his lap and held it up.

It was the printed notice—the Corazon's *proclamação!*

"You dictated this, according to the port officer's *segundo.* He remembered you distinctly as the Yankee who got off a freighter yesterday with a basket of sticks."

"Yes. I dictated it."

"Then, whoever you are, you have decided to take the law in your hands?"

"In your father's time certain patriots took the law in their hands because of a great injustice. They cleaned out the carpetbaggers from the South."

The old man nodded slowly, his deep eyes shining. He was an exact picture of the Brigadier come to life—the Brigadier of the Reconstruction days.

The chapel bell kept tolling and the old man had to raise his voice. "I am beginning to think my granddaughter—young as she is—may understand you better than I." Then to Starr's astonishment he said, "That bell is to signal to the police who are hunting you in the Hevea stands. If you are innocent I must have time to convince them lest they shoot you on sight. You'd better come into the hall."

It might be a trap, Starr thought. This old gentleman still hated a Yankee. Yesterday he had all but kicked him out of the house. But Clayburn was not the type to spring traps. Like the Brigadier, whose spirit ruled over this house, he was the type who would produce two dueling pistols and give his enemy the first shot. Starr went in.

HE HAD entered with the hope of talking to Clarissa, but the hall was empty. Old Clayburn, of course, had ordered his daughter, as well as his young wife, to stay out of the way. After all, the identity of this Yankee was still in doubt. There was the possibility, though a remote one, that he might be what they said he was—Corazon.

"Sit down." Clayburn waved to a chair, wheeled his own chair around, facing Starr. And then it happened, just as Starr expected it to happen.

The girl ran out from a side room. The *senhora* was with her, babbling frantically, trying to hold her back.

Clayburn did not attempt to keep them out. It would have been too obvious a gesture of fear. Besides it was too late. "All right, come in, both of you," he said calmly. "But sit over there."

The *senhora* obeyed, but Clarissa came straight to Starr and put out her hand welcoming him. Starr was glad that it was his left palm that bore that detestable mark. He kept one fist doubled while shaking hands with her. He imagined that everyone was trying to catch a glimpse of his palm, and it may not have been imagination, for Clarissa herself looked down. "I see that your hand isn't taped—the way they said." Then she laughed, turning to her grandfather. "I told you that was perfect nonsense!"

Clayburn and the *senhora* both nodded, the latter trying to smile. They did not ask Starr to turn his hand up and show them. Of course there was no mark there! They all seemed to take that for granted.

And this was why Starr wasted no time. Instead of explaining how the mix-up in identity had happened, he came straight to the point. "I wanted to talk to you about your overseer," he began.

"Yes, of course," Clayburn cut in. "I heard that my overseer had something to do with the measly trick of nailing mule-irons to the soles of your shoes. But he denies it. Nevertheless if you can give me some proof—"

"I came to accuse him of something more serious than a practical joke," Starr said. "Your overseer is being bribed to delay the production on this *estancia.*"

"What! Manoel! It's a lie! Why he's worked

for me for twenty years. And a whippersnapper like you comes down from the North to tell me—after one day—" He choked.

"I've learned a lot in one day," Starr interrupted. "Everyone who mistook me for Corazon told me secrets I might not have learned in a year."

Clayburn slammed the arm of his chair with the rolled *proclamação*. "It's preposterious! Did you hear him, Maria—and you, Clarissa? This Yankee—" His paroxysm of choking brought the *senhora* running, calling to a servant to bring a glass of water.

Clarissa was the only calm one. "You must have some proof, of course."

"I'm going to get the proof," Starr answered. "Right now all I can do is to add things up. The rubber you are sending to Belem has fallen off suddenly in grade as well as quantity."

"What's that got to do with my overseer?" Clayburn shouted. "Leaf blight has destroyed a lot of my stands."

"But the sernamby you're shipping is made from the bark and residue of the first grade. There should be a proportionate amount of *fina* rubber. Has your overseer explained that?"

"I never asked him to explain it. I've trusted him for years. I've known him since he was a boy. I don't know you! Why should I believe a word you say? You're already under suspicion—"

Starr interrupted calmly, "And there are a few more points I'd like your overseer to explain to you. Why has he done everything in his power to keep me from coming to this *estancia*? A waiter picks a fight with me, a cab driver tries the same thing. I'm given a mule and a deaf-mute to take me to the Hevea stands. Then this practical joke about the mule-shoes—there is one man at the bottom of it all!"

The *senhora* spoke up for the first time. "I notice you left out my driver who spattered you with mud."

Starr said politely, "I have forgotten that, *senhora*. We all will leave that out of the list."

"I do not wish to leave it out. I was in the car. I scolded the driver. I even told him I believed he did it on purpose. And he admitted it. Yes, he did it, he said, because you were a Yankee." The *senhora* gave an angry toss of her head, looking at her husband. "I thought to myself, to what extremes will our servants go because of your nonsensical hate for these young men from the North. But that was not the whole truth of it."

"The truth—of what?" Clarissa asked.

"The overseer put him up to it," the *senhora* announced quietly. "The driver confessed it all. He said while I was in the cathedral, Manoel said to him, 'There is a Yankee who is just arrived at the pier. Follow him around the *praça* and bump into him or do something to show we do not want Yankees here.' So," the *senhora* concluded, "this young *senhor* seems to be right in his suspicions."

Clayburn gasped. "It's incredible! Manoel—whom I've trusted like my own son." He scowled, trying to think it out. "But look here! He played you a lot of shameful tricks, yes—but then you make a very serious charge against him. You have no actual proof."

"I'll get the proof—if I can meet him face to face."

"Yes!" Clarissa said eagerly. "We'll call Manoel. I'd like to hear you talk to him!"

Clayburn seemed to have come to a conclusion. He smoothed out the *proclamação*, staring at it thoughtfully. "I am beginning to believe that you came here in good faith—to help us produce more rubber. And for thanks you have been kicked and abused and insulted. I'll not have that happen in my house, either to a friend or an enemy. Clarissa!" He waved to the decanters and fruit on the sideboard, then to Starr, indicating that he was to be served and treated from now on as a guest. It was a gesture that proved, by ritual, that the Yankee's status in this manse had changed.

As Clarissa poured the sherry a servant appeared, materializing like a ghost from the shadows—a very lovely ghost. It was that Crillo girl with the dimpled chin. She served the sherry and fruit and nuts to the ladies, then to Starr. With a glass of Amontillado in his right hand, Starr reached for some nuts with his left.

The Crillo girl drew in her breath, dropped her silver platter and the decanter crashed. Her eyes were rimmed white as she stared.

The *senhora* gave a soft scream. Sitting on the sofa to one side of Starr she was in a position to catch a glimpse of his outstretched palm.

Clarissa herself looked down, seeing the sudden contraction of Starr's fingers. The color left her face even though she saw only the back of his hand.

Old Clayburn asked testily, "Now what!"

"His palm!" the *senhora* said in a whisper. "He is the one!"

CHAPTER VII

THE FORTUNE OF CORAZON

A POSSE jogged up the long avenue of palms, the rhythmic pound of hoofs as they came closer syncopating with the jingle of silver rein-chains.

Starr was aware of the sound, but he was more intrigued with the scene of utter consternation inside the manse. As Clayburn was wheeled out of the room by the panic-stricken *senhora* he shouted over his shoulder to Clarissa to follow him—and to escape! Clarissa obeyed but followed only as far as the door and there she turned.

A flush had come back to her cheeks—the flush of excitement after the first shock. Evidently this dénouement was something of a thrill. "So you really are Corazon!"

"Someone tattooed my hand—"

She ignored this preposterous excuse. "Why don't you get out? No one's stopping you." She nodded to the garden where the riders were jingling up toward the pôrte-cochère. "You aren't going to shoot it out with them right in this hall I hope?"

"I'm going to shoot it out with the overseer," Starr said. "If you'll only let me talk to him, I'll clear myself."

"You'll be lynched first!"

"I tell you I'm not Corazon. This tattoo—"

She lifted her hand in a gesture of impatience. "Whoever you are, get into that room!" She nodded to a side door.

He did not have much time to make a decision. One door was as good as another. Horses were wheeling out there as men dismounted. From the sound of hoofs clattering into the backyard as well as out there in front, he guessed easily enough that the manse was surrounded. He slipped into the door she indicated and then heard the click of a turned key.

Whatever her motives, Clarissa Clayburn had at least prevented a gunfight inside her home. Possibly that was her sole motive, but as Starr examined the room he believed she might have had another.

Besides the one door of thick saguan, there was a window barred with hammered iron like the slave wrought filigrees of New Orleans. Probably every window of the first story was similarly protected. At any rate this particular room with its shelves of ant-eaten books, was as good as a prison cell.

Starr was in jail at last!

He heard the wild chattering out in the main hall. It sounded like monkeys in the silk-cotton trees. He could distinguish some of the voices—Clayburn's, the *senhora's*, the girl's, the port officer's. Because of the heavy door Starr could make nothing out of the Babel of Portuguese and English, but by inference, he knew exactly what they said: The bandit had been here, they had identified him by the only mark by which Corazon could be identified in this district. He had posed as Henry Starr of the R.D.C. And he had fled.

But the most important inference Starr could make was this: The girl was not going to deliver the bandit to them. She was keeping him prisoner—for herself.

Starr could guess almost exactly what she had told them. He heard them clattering through the back hall of the manse and out into the yard. He could see them through the filigreed iron of his window, running out to the riders who had already circled the building. Negroes whimpering or calling frantically, lit lanterns, helped search the huts on the quadrangle, the horse stables, the saddle room, the chicken house, the meat house. The port officer and a *guarda civil* came in finally and there was another palaver.

They might have arrived at the logical conclusion that the bandit was hiding somewhere right in this house!

But Clarissa must have thought up a very adequate lie. Perhaps she had made one of the household servants tell the lie for her. At any rate most of the posse left, swinging to their saddles, cutting across the clearing for the black jungle.

THE port officer, however, as Starr learned soon enough, stayed for dinner. And it was not until some time after dinner that Clarissa found a chance to unlock the door to his "cell" and slip in. Her father and the port officer, she said, were having their coffee and fundador brandy. She had her own cup in hand as she came in, and this she handed to Starr.

"How about the *senhora?*"

"She's in the music room talking to two of the police. They're staying all night. But they won't come in here."

"If a servant blunders in what do you expect me to do?"

"I'm keeping the key." She lit a cigarette. "So you see, it's between you and me."

"And you're still convinced you've got a bandit on your hands, a bandit with a trail of murder all the way from the Argentine?"

"No. I'm not convinced. But I'd like you to think up a better story about that mark on your hand."

"I can't. It happened today. A gaucho snipeshot me and knocked me out. Look at this." Starr parted his hair and showed the welt. "I had a feeling I'd been given a drink—we call it a Mickey Finn."

"We call it *cloral hidrato* in Brazil. But I thought you said it was that bump on your head that knocked you out."

"I remember someone giving me a drink. It was while I was drugged that they tattooed me. . . You don't believe me, do you?"

"What would a gaucho be doing with a tattoo needle and ink, or with a drug for that matter?"

"He had lots of time. I was out for five hours. He could've gone back to Porto Risco. He might have had the stuff with him in the first place if he'd planned the whole thing ahead of time." Starr finished hotly, "If you don't believe me, then why don't you let the police take me?"

"Because you want to see Manoel the overseer. I've been trying my best to figure out just why 'Corazon' should want to see Manoel. If it's just because he played those tricks on you, you could get your revenge without coming

here to talk to my grandfather. That is—if you're Corazon. It just doesn't make any sense."

"No. It doesn't make sense, but you've given me a hunch about something," Starr said, studying his palm. "Manoel and Corazon might be in this racket together."

She did not seem to hear this for she was looking at his palm. "That heart!" she said, half to herself. "I don't know much about tattoos, but I've seen the rivermen at Porto Risco. I've heard that here in the Amazon the heat makes the design spread. It gets thicker and fades a little. Yours is bright blue!"

"And the scars are red on the edges from the pricking," Starr added eagerly. "It's not an old tattoo—you can see that for yourself!"

She stared a long time and then said, "If I find the overseer for you—"

"You're afraid I'll kill him, aren't you?"

"If you're Henry Starr, I'm afraid he'll kill you."

She went to the window, stood there as if studying the layout of the quadrangle for the first time in her life. She was looking principally at a single house—the *garconnière*. This was another touch of the Deep South—the *garconnière* which in Louisiana served as a separate home for the sons of the plantation owner.

The girl turned around and said, as if jumping to another subject, "I suppose you think I'm holding you prisoner."

"I don't have to think very hard. You locked me in."

"I was locking everyone else out."

This was quite a logical answer and Starr was inclined to believe it. "But—you said you were keeping the key."

"If you wanted it, how could I keep it now that I'm here in this room with you?"

"You could scream if I so much as reached for it."

That was a logical answer, too. She tossed the key on the table. "There it is. You'd better leave this house. You might be Corazon or you might be what you say you are. I don't know whether to believe you or not. I only know that there's no one else on this fazenda, or in Porto Risco or the whole State of Amazonas who'll believe you. Whoever you are, I'm not going to see you lynched. I'm going to have a horse saddled and hitched behind that smoke-house." She pointed beyond the quadrangle. "In a few minutes you can go."

"But I don't want to go." Starr picked up the key and handed it to her. That ought to convince her, once and for all!

He saw her puzzled frown smoothing slowly. "If I tell you where you can find Manoel—" She broke off and said anxiously, "Did you say something about killing?"

"No. A dead man can't make any confession."

"If you're Henry Starr and came here to help my grandfather," she said, "and if Manoel knows something that will save you from being hanged—"

"It will save more than just me."

She hesitated for one moment, then, "Manoel lives in that *garconnière*. He's not there now, I've found out. But when he comes, he'll come from the stables and cross that flagstone walk. You can catch just a glimpse of him before he goes under that trellis. That *fanal* will stay lighted. The port officer advised us to keep lights on all night."

The *fanal* was another Southern touch—a lantern hanging above the door of the little house. But so much light might be more of a hindrance than a help. "How about those sentries you've posted everywhere?"

"A servant girl will be on watch, too. When Manoel comes home tonight she will take some beer out to the sentries. Mapimi knows how to flirt with a *guarda*. You will have to watch your chance. And here—you'd better take this back." She gave him the key.

Starr grinned. "Leave the rest to me."

IN Clarissa Clayburn's veins there was the blood of that Brigadier. She had a predilection for daring and adventure, Starr reflected. The plan she had sketched out for him was a rash one worthy of her ancestor who had taken long chances at Gettysburg. Even so, the plan might have gone smoothly enough except for one bad slip-up.

Starr sat at the window trying not to doze. He was glad he had slept for five solid hours that afternoon, even though the sleep had been imposed at least partially by knockout drops. His headache had passed, leaving an intermittent throbbing. He was kept awake by excitement and also by the macaws which squeal in the trees at night, and the soft thrumming of a marimba in a servant's hut.

Outside in the moonlit quadrangle of adobes, he could see a policeman in frayed jeans and unbuttoned jacket, sitting, smoking, nodding. A little way off another sentry discussed a bantam cock which a stable *moco* showed him. Later the port officer came out, talked to his men, followed the *moco* across the yard. Starr hoped he was going home, but evidently he had merely gone to see that his pony and those of his men were properly stabled, for after a while he came back.

Lights went out in the huts. The marimba stopped, giving way to the macaws. A girl with the usual serape of black zigzag design came out from the kitchen house and sat under a calabash tree. A hanging lantern threw her face into a relief of high cheekbones and full-lipped mouth and dimpled chin. The two sentries took notice of her and cast dice. Apparently the winner was to make the approach.

Starr watched this Brazilian harlequinade

with considerable interest until he heard the doorknob clicking behind him. He turned and watched the knob a moment as it twisted softly. This might be a servant trying to come in, in which case it would be best to forget it. But then there was a soft knock.

A servant would not be apt to try the door first and then knock so surreptitiously. Nor would the *senhora* knock. Nor the police. Starr opened it.

Clarissa came in with food and also a warning.

"Several of the police are staying all night. You see everyone thinks that the bandit might come back. I've had that horse saddled anyway and it's ready, in case you change your mind about staying here."

"I haven't changed my mind."

She went on to explain that the port officer and a police *médico* were in the music room right now with her grandfather and the *senhora*. Starr would have to be careful when he slipped out. He would have to open the door a crack at first and be sure that no one was in the main hall which was brilliantly lighted.

"You may need the horse. It's one of our fastest."

She went out and then a few minutes later—as Starr surmised—she came back. He saw the doorknob turning again. It was not a slow turning this time, but an impatient click. He did not wait for the knock.

This was the slip-up. Thinking that something had gone wrong and the girl was in a hurry to see him, he opened the door. The woolly-headed, pop-eyed butler stood there facing him.

The old Negro was so petrified that Starr had no difficulty clapping a hand over his gaping lips and pulling him into the room.

With the door closed and locked, Starr turned and shoved the old fellow into a chair. "You seem to have sense enough not to yell."

"No, *senhor*. Not to yell. Not by any manner or condition," the old man breathed.

"You are my *amigo*," Starr said, sticking a *cigarillo* between the man's lips. "Smoke that and cool off. You *are* my amigo?"

"Yes, *senhor*. Thoroughly." The butler let the *cigarillo* fall down his hanging jaw and into his lap. He picked it up and lit it showing his complete obedience. "I will smoke it, *senhor*. I will cool off, yes. Please, *senhor!* You won't beat me to death?"

"Of course not, but stop shaking. Here, I'll light it. Now take it easy when you answer me. What did you come in here for?"

"Don Clayburn sent me for a book to show the guests."

There was no reason to doubt this. But it brought up an awkward point. If this old servant did not return with the book, what would happen next? Clayburn might become impatient and send someone else.

"Mapini knows how to flirt with a guarda."

"If I let you take the book you will tell everyone I'm here."

"Oh no, *senhor*. Completely no!"

"You wouldn't want one of my gauchos to come here later and make you pay for telling on me?"

The servant took this very seriously. It was such a serious question that beads of sweat oozed out of the ebony skin, glistening in white wool. He tried to speak without having breath enough. He gasped, "No, *senhor*. I do not want to be killed. But if anything happens to the Donzela Clarissa or to my master, or to the *senhora*, then I would rather die myself. Yes, I would die first, *senhor*. Can I go now?"

"You're a very brave old man," Starr remarked. "I like what you just said. You'd die for them. But you aren't going to die. That is—not if you tell me the truth. What were they doing when you left?"

"The *senhora* is telling fortunes."

It was a simple and natural enough way to entertain the officers, Starr thought. In order to find out just who was in the music room, he asked, "And whose fortune is she telling?"

"Yours, *senhor.*"

"How can she tell mine when I'm not there?"

"She saw your palm. She entertains her many guests with her gift as a palmist."

Here was a chance to find out a little more. "What is she telling them about me?"

"According to your palm, and the stars in the sky, you have fled to the rain forests and will never come back."

"Not a very good fortune teller," Starr chuckled. "At least she didn't read my palm very well." He looked down at the tattooed heart, then suddenly exclaimed under his breath: "She's right! I'm not Corazon! The real Corazon probably did just what she said. He fled to the rain forests and will never come back!"

There was one result of her "prognostication." It would tend to relieve all anxiety. But surely the *senhora* would not want the vigilance relaxed, unless she herself was convinced that Starr was innocent!

"That's the answer!" Starr exclaimed with a great lift of spirits. He had three women on his side now. Besides Clarissa there was the *crillo* servant girl attending to the sentries, while the *senhora* attended to the officers! There was the possibility that Clarissa and the *senhora* had cooked up this fortune-telling séance together in order to get rid of the police. There was no doubt about it. The *senhora* could have had no other motive in announcing, "The bandit is gone! He will never come back!"

"I don't take much stock in horoscopes or palm-reading," Starr said to the Negro. "But perhaps the *senhora* has some uncanny gift. Corazon isn't here. Her prophecy is right."

The butler gaped and scratched his wool. "I am mixed up. It is true, the *senhora* has never made a mistake. Don Clayburn and also the *donzela* will even bet on the races according to her readings of the stars!"

"Then if she said Corazon has fled, who am I?"

"You are Cor—no, you can not be Corazon. It is impossible! But you are sitting right there laughing at me. You are somebody! But who?"

Starr did not answer. He had just seen a light break out in the bougainvillaeas.

The overseer had come home at last.

The problem of the butler could be settled now very simply. Starr merely locked him in the room.

SLIPPING out through the empty hall to the side gallery, he hid for a moment in the thick screen of potted plants and hanging baskets of ferns.

He saw the sentry sitting in the shadow of a tree, a ray slanting through orchids and picking out the bright red and black serape of the pretty *crillo* girl. He saw the same flash of red and black once again when he crept out into the yard and into the safe darkness of a trellised arbor.

That servant girl must have mistaken Clarissa's orders or else she was playing a game of her own. For Starr saw the bright flash of red once again scurrying off silently through the garden toward the door of the *garconnière.*

There was only one explanation for this break in the plan—a very alarming one. The *crillo* girl was going to warn the overseer!

It was for that reason that Starr did not go straight to the door of the *garconnière.* He slipped around the flower bushes that banked the little building and crept up to the cement pilings on which all of these jungle houses were built. He climbed to the platform and found a window in back. It was shuttered but tiny spears of light shot out on the flowers, through the slits between the bamboo. Starr crept closer, peered with one eye through a slit, saw a part of the lighted room inside.

A man had flopped to a rattan chair and was taking off his tattered, mud-smeared jacket of white drill.

It was not the overseer. It was a lean man with skin cured and toughened to leather. A man with tired, gray eyes and a long blue-peppered jaw.

It was the real Corazon.

A gun poked between Starr's shoulder blades as he peered through the shutters. Naturally enough, Corazon would have a man on guard before going into that *garconnière.* And the guard would not be one of his own *contrabistos* but someone who belonged here on the grounds, someone who would arouse no suspicions if he were seen.

Starr recognized the voice that ordered him to lift his arms. He also recognized the strong odor of pomade and cologne as the voice said, "You will turn and walk under this trellis, my friend."

As Starr was marched along through the black shadows he had time to think. The overseer, Manoel, had evidently come with Corazon without knowing that a squad of the *policia* was staying all night. But just why Corazon should come at all was a puzzle which Starr had no hope of solving. For the moment he just marched. He noticed that Manoel's high boots were not thumping with their usual swashbuckling gait. Obviously Manoel did not want to be heard by the servants in the huts or by the *policia* in the quadrangle. It made the situation somewhat simpler. At least Starr breathed a sigh of relief when he knew that the gun in his back was not likely to go off while the *policia* were there.

That was why, when he was marched into the pigeon house and a latch clicked behind

Starr felt a blow aimed in the dark, a blade ripping the shoulder of his jacket. He whirled, tackling the man by the knees, dumping him.

him, he decided to ignore the gun entirely.

It was a wise decision, for it seemed quite probable that the overseer had brought him in here to kill him, and to kill him silently. It might be done outside with a knife, but this method would have involved a certain risk, especially if it had been attempted back there when Starr was peeking through the window of the *garconnière*. A man with a knife in his back might give at least one gasp, perhaps a cry. The *policia* would have come running and they would have found Starr lying right outside that window.

But inside this pigeon house, despite the sudden fluttering and cooing, the thing could be done quietly. Manoel could then announce that he had caught the "bandit" hiding in this shack. He would do this, of course, after giving Corazon sufficient time to get to his horse and escape. Starr, dead, could tell no tales—not even with the mute sign language of his own palm!

The moment that Starr felt the pressure of the gun barrel relax, his own knees relaxed and he fell, pretending a dead faint.

He had guessed right about the knife, for he felt a blow aimed in the dark, a blade ripping the shoulder of his jacket. He whirled, tackled the man by the knees, dumping him.

Before Manoel could lift his arm for another stroke, a knee was against his throat pressing downward.

Manoel must have given up the safer plan—to commit this murder silently—for he tried to yell. But Starr's knee cut off his breath so that the yell was muted down to a faint gurgle no louder than the excited cooing of the birds.

The knee pressed hard until the paroxysm stopped and the taut muscles melted to fat. In the pitch dark the odor of sweat and perfume, of flowers and of pigeons was strong and it gave Starr the sickening impression that the man was dead and this was a funeral parlor. He struck a match.

It flickered on a face that was like a green pumpkin. Manoel, the overseer, might be out for good, Starr thought anxiously. He shifted his weight a little, giving the turgid throat a chance. He tore the sacking from the window so that moonlight filtered in through the chicken wire. As the whir and clatter of the pigeons subsided he could hear the overseer gurgling through his teeth as he sucked for breath.

STARR lit another match, picked up a gun from the sawdust, then jumped to the window. The moonlit quadrangle was deserted. The sentry had disappeared—perhaps into one of the huts to enjoy some banana beer. After all, the sentries were not on the alert. They had no remote reason to think that the bandit would come back to the manse. They knew that they were here merely to bolster the morale of the household. They could do this without walking their posts. As a matter of fact the overseer and Corazon had come back to the grounds without the sentries' knowing anything about it.

Starr's first impulse was to call out at the top of his voice, announcing the news: *The real Corazon was here on the grounds! Let the* policia *arrest him!* Starr would be cleared once and for all!

This was a very simple solution to all his troubles except for one or two complications. Corazon had had time to escape to the jungle. And in that case, who was going to believe a word that Starr said? He looked down at the overseer whose eyes were half out of their sockets and blood red. He pressed a gun against the swollen tongue.

Manoel swallowed then choked, "Don't shoot, *senhor,* I beg! I will confess everything—only give me my life!"

"That's your best play, unless you figure you can get away with any lies."

"Please, *senhor,* I was told to keep you away from this *estânçia.* I will even confess whose orders I obeyed. Corazon's! There, *senhor.* Surely you will believe that for you saw him here yourself!"

Yes, it was easy to believe. Corazon had come here with Manoel, and the latter had stayed on watch outside that flower-banked shack. Hence they were birds of a feather, and accomplices. But why should a bandit like Corazon object to a rubber technician coming to investigate Clayburn's estate?

Starr held his gun against Manoel's face. "What was Corazon doing here?"

"He came to see his woman."

This was easy to believe, too. Starr remembered seeing that girl running toward the *garconnière.* "You mean he's in love with that *zambo!*"

"To be sure, *senhor!* He is so much in love he came here even though I warned him that the *policia* were riding everywhere. But she is not a *zambo.* Of the lower classes, yes." He talked fast, killing time, talking for his life. "From the waterfront of Buenos Aires where she worked in a tent carnival before she was brought to this household!"

Starr swore as he took another look out there in the quadrangle. The *crillo* servant girl was a fine one for Clarissa to pick out as a confidante! She was a good flirt, yes, to handle a policeman, especially when she was protecting her bandit lover!

Manoel had told the whole truth. For as Starr looked out to the yard he caught a glimpse of two riders passing through a band of moonlight at the edge of the clearing. He saw the white clothes and black sombrero of one, the gaily embroidered serape of the other.

It would be wise to bind this overseer hand and foot and gag him, Starr thought. But he had no rope nor wire, nor did he have the time.

"If you tell the *policia,*" he said, "so much the better. Let them ride! If they track me, they'll be tracking Corazon, too. Go ahead and tell them to saddle up! Tell 'em I was here in this pigeon coop. Let 'em chase me!"

He slipped out and ran through the flower patches to the corral in back of the stables.

A horse was at the hitchrack saddled and champing—the horse Clarissa had promised. When Starr leaped to the saddle a stable *moco* came running, then yelling. Lights went on in all the huts, sentries shouted, the port officer ran out on the back gallery of the manse. And as Starr rode for the jungle the bell of the plantation chapel began to toll.

CHAPTER VIII

SHOOT-OUT

IT WAS impossible to shake off that posse. Although Starr's pony ran like a race horse, the pursuers knew the trails. In the longer stretches Starr outdistanced them, but at every turn where he lost the trail and had to

hunt for it, the riders almost caught up. At each stream where he had to find a fording, he lost more time. Because of the maze of trails he kept out of reach of his pursuers, but for the same reason he lost all trace of Corazon.

And he got lost himself. He rode in circles. He stopped to breathe his horse, then walked, leading it along the dark overhung *estradas.* He rested in the brush, and when he was finally convinced that he was free of the posse, he dozed. But he dozed with one eye open like the wild dogs. He was a hunted fugitive now—branded by his own act of fleeing.

He could imagine what they were saying back there at the Clayburn manse. He could imagine what the girl herself believed. For a very plausible story must have been told. He had attacked the overseer, thrown him half dead in the pigeon house, then escaped to the jungle. Clarissa would not know why he had decided to escape. No one would know the truth—that the real Corazon had come for a tryst with his sweetheart in that *garconnière!*

A gray light broke in what he thought was the west. It increased his panic for he had the crazy feeling that the night was beginning instead of ending. Sometimes, it is said, a man lost in the woods will refuse to believe his compass. Starr refused to believe that that gray light was in the east and that dawn was breaking.

He decided to inquire into this phenomenon when he found a rubber-tapper's hut. Why does dawn come to the Amazon valley with a sun rising in the west? It might not be the sun. It might be marsh fire.

The sleepy man who came out was evidently one of Clayburn's rubber hunters for he spoke a little English. Starr could see the

Those two shots had brought the other men scrambling over the latex balls and brush.

white shirt and white jeans but the man's face in contrast was almost black in the shadows. He might have been a mulatto. But, seeing him, Starr lost something of his bewilderment. He was not alone any more in the vast jungle.

"I am lost, *amigo*. I need a guide. Here is some money."

"A guide to where, *senhor?*"

That was a hard question. Starr did not know exactly where. Not back to the Clayburn manse, although he wanted to see Clarissa Clayburn again and explain to her why he had run away. She must be made to understand that he had fled to the jungle, chasing Corazon. Of course she would not believe it, because he would have to prove that Corazon had been there at the manse. And this gave Starr an inspiration.

He answered the rubber tapper: "I need a guide to Corazon's camp."

"But who are you?" the tapper asked in a changed voice.

"I am Corazon."

The man came out of the hut and into the gray light. Starr could see his head tilted upward tensely, his hands pressed together at his chest like all those other natives when they faced Corazon—the attitude of praying.

"Yes, *senhor*. Please! I understand. You are lost. You want to get to your *acampamento*. I will lead you. But—" he hesitated, his hands twisting. "But you do not talk like Corazon!"

"I had too much *guaro* to drink. That's why I'm lost."

He saw the head nodding. "*Sim!* That is the way it happens when a man drinks. The thickness of the tongue; he is himself but he is not like himself. You are Corazon and yet—"

"And yet you want to be sure."

"*Sim!* For if you are not, and I take you to the *acampamento*—"

Starr lit a match, but shaded it from his face. He shaded it with his palm held up in full view of the mulatto. The latter gasped to his saints. "You are even he! I will lead you, my *mestre!*"

Sunrise increased the delusion that time was going backward. The redder the sky, the darker it grew in the narrow estrada under the canopy of branches and vines. The trail up which the guide led him became a sort of tunnel, the shadows deepening. Starr led his horse at a walk, kept well behind the rubber hunter lest that awkward question of identity should come up again. He did not want to talk. He did not want to be seen.

The tunnel crossed a swamp, then dry caked mud, then opened on a glen where the reflection of the morning sky sifted down in a suffused glow. In this queer light Starr and his guide each made a discovery at about the same moment. The floor of this glen was heaped with balls of coagulated latex—hundreds, perhaps thousands, of them. Starr could not compute the end of that hoard of rubber because of the matting of interlaced vines making a partial screen. It was Corazon's loot. Not a few contos from the *banco* in Porto Risco, but wealth that could be measured in hundred of thousands of dollars!

STARR jumped from his horse, drew his knife and ran to the first ball. While he was slicing into it, the mulatto gave a groan as if that knife were stuck into his own body. He stared aghast at Starr's face in this new light, then jumped into the brush like a gopher into its hole. Starr never saw him again. And for the moment he did not even think of him. He was interested in examining this ball of latex. Here was the fine Para, Clayburn's rubber of the first grade which had never reached Belem!

Monkeys chattered in the dense trees above him. They had objected to this rider dismounting, and more monkeys down the sloping valley were objecting to something else—with the same irascible scolding. It was easy for Starr to guess that he was not alone here.

He did not make the mistake of going back to his horse. Kneeling there slicing into the forty pound ball of latex, he was screened by the brush matting so that only the tip of his hat was exposed. He crawled further into the piles of half hidden balls, the matting above screening him so that he was safe as a bug in a rug—and as hard to find. But the pony was more like a bug in a web. There was no possibility of a pony running through that mass of vines. It was almost like the mesquite back in the States where a horse is helpless.

Hiding where he was, Starr took off his hat, poked his head up through a mat of vines and looked around him.

In the time it took him to peer in every direction he counted five men. That is to say, five sombreros.

They were bobbing up over the tangle of vines, disappearing, moving, closing in toward the horse. The monkeys had started a fine argument now, gibbering and squeaking, swinging from one branch to the next, jumping on all fours.

Starr crawled further away from his horse, staying well under cover, hoping somehow to get back to that tunnel-like *estrada* by which he had entered the valley. But then, scarcely ten yards ahead of him, he saw the wide, flaring pants, bulging belt pockets and *rehenque* whip of a gaucho. From the belt up, the figure was invisible in the green tangle—as a man standing waist-deep in water might appear to a fish.

This gaucho had obviously heard the rustle of twigs and leaves where Starr was creeping, for he squatted all of a sudden, whirling at the same time.

The instant before Starr squeezed off a shot he recognized the black jaw and red eyes. Flame came from the gaucho's hand as fast as a snake's tongue. But he had fired purely by guesswork, sensing where Starr was, like a dog that can sense the slightest movement without perception of form or color. The shot creased Starr in the shoulder, but the gaucho had a slug in his own chest.

Starr kept crawling, now in the opposite direction, for the bug in the rug had bumped into something hot.

Those two shots had brought the other men scrambling over balls and brush, one almost landing feet foremost on Starr's head. This time his shot sliced up across the man's thigh through the wide flare of pampas pants, burning the belt. He fired again as the man was in his arms. This wrestling with a dying man seemed simple enough, except that just before the muscles relaxed a shot bored between their pressed bodies. Starr felt as if a boa hugged him—a boa unlike any in the world, for it had a sting.

He crawled on, dragging himself—he did not know in what direction. He knew that his clothes were sticking to him as if he had been ducked in a tub. He crawled, wondering how many times he had been hit and how much lead he was carrying. It must have been a lot—weighed by the pound, then by the ton. Because of his hiding place he had had the drop on each man who tried to run him down, but he was not a safe bug any more. He was a wounded snake, crawling.

He tried to remember how many men he had picked off. Two was as far as he could count. After that he had bumped into one man who seemed like three. But he saw the man first, and had a good shot at him before they closed in. Then came two more—one with a rifle. And again he saw them first wading through the brush.

He had to use his second gun now—the gun he had frisked from the overseer back in the pigeon house at Clayburn's. He swore aloud as he started throwing shots with this second weapon. He should have taken the time to search the overseer for more cartridges.

Two and three would make five. That might have been the right computation with an average of about three shots to a man. But he could not make any more computations. The important answer was right in his hand.

Both of his guns were empty.

A DOZEN riders stopped in a narrow *estrada* where the mud was caked dry. Here they found prints as clear as words on paper. One of the riders was the port officer, another the overseer of the Clayburn estancia, another was a girl. These three were talking to a frightened mulatto.

"You say he did not come this way?" the port officer asked, wiping the mist from his pince-nez. "But here are fresh tracks. Why do you lie?"

"These tracks may have been of another horse ridden by another man than Corazon. Who knows of such things?"

The overseer, Manoel, exclaimed as if this settled the matter, "Of course! We are on the wrong trail. A goose chase. He did not come this way at all!"

The port officer swore. "All night you have been saying that same thing, Manoel. 'He did not come this way at all!' First you say he choked you and dragged you into the *pigeonnièrre*, then you tell us he went one way, when a stable *moco* saw him go the other. What is this equivocation—unless you are afraid to catch up with the bandit every time he is within our grasp?"

The overseer wheedled, "But I believe this *seringueiro*."

"He equivocates for the same reason. All these *seringueiros* are afraid to death of bandits."

The *seringueiro* insisted humbly, "But the rider I saw was not Corazon."

"You told us you saw his tattooed hand!" the port officer shouted. "And now you deny it! Were you drunk or what?"

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"*He* was drunk—so I thought. I did not suspect until he lit a match and showed the heart in his hand. But then after a long time I saw his face."

The girl turned in her saddle suddenly, looking down at the mulatto. "Then you know when you saw his face, that it was not Corazon?"

"But yes, *senhorinha.*"

"But how did you know that?" the port officer barked. "No one in this district knows what he looks like except by the mark in his hand."

"I have seen him more than once while I tapped the Hevea trees hereabouts. A chicle hunter told me it was even he. And I have seen his band of *cosecheros.* I have even heard them talk. So I know that the man who made these tracks was not the man you search."

Clarissa looked around at the circle of riders. "I hope you all heard that! This man saw a rider who was lost, he saw his palm with the tattooed heart, and yet he knows the man was not Corazon!"

"This is a peculiar thing," the port officer said. "The *seringueiro* tells us we are on the wrong trail, the overseer tells us when we almost catch up that we must wait lest there are henchmen in ambush, and now you *senhorinha,* you tell us we are hunting the wrong man. No one seems to want to catch this *ládrão!*"

"It is the charm of all bandits that seems to hang over his life," one of the *policia* said. "I am for going home. My horse is lame and as for me, give me eggs and *maté.*"

The port officer made the decision. While they rested their ponies he sent one of the *policia* into the tunnel-like path where the hoofprints led. It looked like a trail made by

wild pigs or tapirs. It was not an *estrada* cut into the forest but more like a trail of wild beasts leading perhaps to a lair. And this was almost the truth.

Before the scout came back the posse heard shooting, intermittent and muffled, coming from what seemed a great distance. Perhaps not so great a distance, the *policia* argued, for the jungle affects the hearing as the pampas affects the sight. The distance and even the direction of shots could not be measured.

The scout came back, low-crouched in his saddle to avoid the overhanging brush as he galloped his horse. Yes, there was some shooting of guns, he announced, just beyond this thick stand of trees and down in a gorge. And there were men in the gorge prowling everywhere, questing fearfully, as if hunting some wild beast. Whatever it was they hunted, it stayed hidden, crawling unseen in the brush—an anaconda perhaps, or at least something very dangerous.

But that was not the important part of the scout's report. There was rubber in the brush of the gorge—balls of it piled high, partly hidden, but many piles, acres of them, as far as the eye could see.

Corazon came closer, said tauntingly, "What's the matter with your gun? No slugs left? Can't you throw just one shot at me?"

Everyone was mounted ready to ride as the port officer planned the safest approach into the gorge. Clarissa swung her horse broadside in the trail and was watching Manoel, the overseer, who had drifted his own pony to the side.

"Can it be possible, Manoel," the girl asked with a level stare, "that Corazon and his men have been stealing our rubber for many months?"

"I can not imagine how," the overseer said, "but it is possible, yes, perhaps."

"And perhaps," the girl went on, "they are holding it until America has no more rubber for her millions of cars. And then these acres of rubber balls will be sold at a great price."

The overseer tried to press his horse past the girl's. "Yes, *senhorinha*, that is possible too," he muttered.

"But someone must have helped Corazon, someone from within. As they say, 'an inside job.' You seem to know of this cache of rubber, Manoel, because it wasn't until now that you tried to slip away from us!"

She grabbed his reins and called to the last rider of the posse swinging off in single file. "You have handcuffs to make an arrest?"

"To be sure, *senhorinha*," the rider, who was one of the police, called back. "But we have not caught the bird. The bird is still in the bush."

Clarissa said, clinging to the overseer's reins,

"Then here is one that is worth two in the bush. I want you to arrest Manoel."

Manoel yanked his reins free but two of the police *guardas* whipped their ponies up on either side. "This will be done, *senhorinha*, this arrest. But for what cause?"

The girl made her announcement calmly. "Because he is Corazon's *segundo*."

STARR saw a man walking down from a thatched hut at the lower end of the gorge, wending his way carefully between the conical heaps of balls. This man wore a black sombrero and a suit of tropic drill. Even at that distance Starr was able to recognize him easily.

Three gauchos, half hidden in the ferns on the side of the gorge, were pointing to the spot where Starr had fired his last shot. They had learned a lesson apparently. Five of them had learned it too late. The lesson was simple: It is suicide to go near a man who is protected on all sides by rubber balls and hidden by lianas.

They were baffled and they were also humiliated. They had been beaten by a rubber technician who was no special expert at gunplay to start with. He was just the average North American. But the average North American has a trick of waiting until he can hit what he aims for—a trick his forefathers practiced at Bunker Hill.

Corazon had that gift too. Crafty and probably as cowardly as any gangster from the States, he also had the gangster's delusion of grandeur. Starr guessed that was why Corazon came swaggering out to hunt for him. He wanted to show off. He wanted to show his henchmen—the ones that were still alive. And he wanted to show his woman.

His woman was in the hut. Starr caught a glimpse of her standing well inside the doorway, a shaft of sunlight striking bright on her red and black serape.

Corazon was out of range when he saw Starr's head lolling back on a weed-slimed pillow of rubber. It looked like a possible shot, despite the range, but Corazon did not want to miss. That would be too humiliating. He crouched low, running, and appeared again some distance to one side. The shot would be much easier now.

Once more he raised his gun, but being at heart a little boy who likes to keep his cake, he held his shot, then stood up so that everyone could see him. He wanted his girl to miss nothing.

Starr made the mistake of squeezing the trigger and the click of it must have reached Corazon's ears for he began to grin. He saw Starr's hand sink, weighted with that insufferably heavy automatic. Both of his hands lay in his lap, palms turned helplessly upward.

Corazon came closer, close enough to talk in a good loud voice. "Got to hand it to you, Buster! They said you couldn't even draw! And they said you wouldn't fight."

"I'm still fighting," Starr said, but his voice was like one of those older monkeys up in the ceibas.

"Kind of groggy, aren't you? What's the matter with your gun? No slugs left? Too bad! I thought we'd have a good shoot-out. Instead, my men will say you were dead before I got here. They can't even hear you. Makes me sore! Can't you throw just one shot at me?"

He asked it, almost pleading, leaning eagerly across one of the rubber balls. He was still acting, every gesture a bit of stage business for the benefit of that face in the grass *cabaña*.

"You turned out a better bandit than we figured," he went on. "Pretend you were me! You, a professor, a botanist—calling yourself Corazon! It made me sore. Especially your getting a heart tattooed on you—that made me made as hell."

"As if it wasn't your idea!" Starr tried to sneer. "Why all these lies? You can't help showing off, even when you're murdering—"

"It wasn't my idea!" Corazon said hotly. "One of my men barked you on the head and instead of finishing you he let you lie there in a knock-out. It was my girl tattooed you. A rubber-hunter came and told her. It was her idea, not mine. Made me sore—her tattooing the same heart in your hand which she put in mine!"

Starr scarcely heard this rather picturesque revelation. A girl—the same girl—had tattooed that heart on both of them! But Starr was thinking of something else far more concerned with life and death. He was thinking of one of the dead men lying in a mass of ferns and parasites a little behind him. If Corazon kept talking long enough Starr might risk a break. One convulsive twist, a roll, and he could duck behind this rubber ball. Then he must crawl a few feet to that sprawled body behind him—the body of the last man Starr had killed.

The inspiration had come slowly, started by a vague memory. That last man had tried to hunt Starr down with a rifle: that was why he was dead. For his rifle in this in-fighting had given Starr the advantage.

Corazon seemed to know what his victim was thinking, perhaps by the sudden tenseness of an arm, the furtive glance of an eye toward the bushes. "What you figure on doing? Going to try for a break? All right. I'll let you stand up. I want you to stand up so they can see you. Don't just lie there staring at me. Get up and take it like a man! Show some guts. Don't take it lying down!"

He stopped jeering, conscious of other voices, more urgent than his own—the frantic shouts from his men. He glanced over his shoulder and saw his men running.

Shots winked in the green light at the lower

end of the valley. Gauchos scurried through the brush, crouched, turned, hurling their shots, then kept running. They were all running in the same direction—toward a brush corral near the *cabaña*.

And Corazon ran, even though as an afterthought he turned quickly to put a coup de grâce into the bleeding man he had been deriding. But Starr was not there.

He was behind a pile of rubber balls crawling into the matted vines, groping for the rifle which lay near a crumpled body. When he found it and peered back through the screen of brush he saw Corazon hurdling the piles of rubber, heading for the *cabaña*.

STARR beaded on him slowly, squinting hard with one glassy eye. There was no expert draw required for this shot. He even had time enough to pick the spot—on Corazon's left side under the armpit, the spot which deer hunters call "the life."

When he squeezed off the shot he thought with a dazed grin, "A rifle is sweet!" And he still grinned as he struggled to his feet and leaned heavily against a mossy cushion of rubber. He wanted to stay there in comfort forever, but he wanted something else much more. He must get to that *cabaña* where Corazon was in the arms of his tattooist sweetheart.

He must get there before the gauchos—and that woman—dragged their chief to a saddle. They must not take him off into the Amazon swamps. Starr wanted him! Alive or dead, it made no difference as long as he could show this posse the tell-tale heart on Corazon's flesh.

But the gauchos did not take him. With five of their number already curled up in the brush, and two more picked off by the posse, the few that remained saddled up and fled.

Starr sank to his knees before he reached the door of the palm-thatched *cabaña*. But he was close enough to see the woman kneeling by the body of her lover.

Her face brought up a string of disconnected pictures in his memory. A tent carnival in Buenos Aires—that was where Corazon had been a conman. There would be a tattoist there, and a sharpshooter perhaps, and a barker and a palmist. Corazon himself may have been the sharpshooter, as well as the conman. And the tattoist may also have been the palmist. Starr thought the overseer had meant the *crillo* servant girl when he described her: "Of the lower classes, from the waterfront of Buenos Aires!"

But it was not the *crillo* girl. Starr tried to focus his eyes on the tragic face of the woman as the port officer and the *policia* came riding up. High thin eyebrows—a flash of many jewels, a patrician face—not patrician but beautiful—the face of a Spanish gypsy perhaps.

Starr's mind wandered, going in a circle, starting at the moment of mud spattering on his immaculate whites, ending at this moment when his whites were spattered with his own blood; then back again to the gutters of Porto Risco, where her car almost ran him down.

She had done it on purpose! And to divert suspicion from herself she had blamed the overseer who was already blamed for the insults of the waiter and the cabman. But this bejeweled woman was at the bottom of it all—this Spanish beauty who had turned from tattooing hearts on sailors to embroidering them on silk; this gypsy who had married an old aristocrat, but still loved her tent carnival sweetheart from the waterfront of Buenos Aires!

Starr heard voices gasping, "*Senhora!*"

But the *senhora* still knelt before Corazon. She had come into the jungle with him at last, eloping, knowing that their game was lost. And now she had lost him too.

As Starr tried to focus his eyes on her, her face faded away and dissolved into blue sky and a golden tan. No, not the sky. That was the color of the eyes looking down at him.

Clarissa was here, bending over him. Someone said—it might have been the port officer's voice and it might have been much later, for Starr lost the sense of time—"The job you came to do, *senhor*—for us, for you States, for the Don Clayburn, for Brazil—it is done well!"

And other voices said, "*Muito bem!* Well done, *senhor!*"

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES DYE

NOT SO TOUGH GUY

By

JOHN SCOTT DOUGLAS

ONE of Alaska's so-called "dry rains" was bucketing down as we crossed the bridge over Ketchikan Creek and started climbing the rise through the Indian section of town. Adam Whalon's shore navigation was notoriously shaky, so instead of using the sidewalk, he steered a straight course along the gravel road, which was running rivulets.

The skipper's classic features had been so soberly thoughtful since he'd left the Coast Guard commander's office that it gave me a start when he finally spoke.

"It's almost like being in the Navy, Mr. Neilson."

"What is?" I asked, uneasily.

"This job we've been assigned." He hesitated. "I know I can safely confide in you—"

Before he could explain what I'd been aching to know, mud splattered astern and a horn honked raucously. Turning, I saw one of Ketchikan's taxi's overhauling us. The driver didn't slow down to allow us to reach the sidewalk, nor did he veer to avoid a big mud puddle. I didn't see him clearly and my glimpse of his passenger's aquiline and somewhat sardonic face was cut short by a sheet of dirty water as the car shot by.

Whalon had fast reactions. Wiping mud from his eyes, he reached under his slicker for his

Whalon interrupted curtly, "Do you apologize to my men, Lieutenant?"

bosun's whistle and blew a shrill blast. The taxi driver ignored us, and though the warrant officer in the rear seat glanced back at us, he gave no order to stop.

"Ha!" barked the skipper. "Sir Walter Raleigh spread his cloak so Queen Elizabeth wouldn't step in the mud going aboard her carriage. Has history so far reversed itself that bosun's mates now spray chief boatswains with bilge-water? I shall meet that young man again as surely as Wellington met Napoleon at Waterloo!"

That was Whalon for you. The money most seamen devoted to pleasure, he spent on volumes of history, naval science and navigation, and he struck historical parallels to most everything that happened.

It was a pity his ability couldn't have been used to better advantage than on the small lighthouse tender he commanded. Whalon was only thirty-seven, but an incipient hernia prevented him from getting a Navy commission, so he attempted to run the pint-sized *Willow* like a battle-wagon. His know-how paid off when we sank a Jap sub at Chaubunoff Bay, losing our own vessel in the fight, but our seven-man crew were far from grateful when the Coast Guard raised and overhauled the *Willow*. She had a whale's appetite and tanks of minnow proportions, and it was always a painful problem in conservation to steam from one oil dock to the next without running short of both oil and water. On this sorry little tender, where the fireman was steward and cook at chow-time and the coxswain was also chief gunner in charge of the fifty-caliber gun, Whalon tried to apply the lessons of history and naval strategy. Still, we admired him as you admire a

great guy you can't quite understand; and we knew he'd stand up even to an admiral for any of his men getting less than a square deal.

I wiped mud from my face as we continued toward the lighthouse depot dock. "What job has the commander asked us to do?"

Whalon's handsome face brightened. "Find a Catalina patrol boat! You see, Mr. Neilson, the plane refueled at Japonski Field near Sitka but apparently developed engine trouble and turned east, perhaps to land here. A captain reported sighting it flying low over Clarence Straits. He heard its engines missing, then they faded out."

"Probably hit a mountain, Captain."

"Commander Wright believes not. Though a storm is now gathering over the straits, the overcast was not then very low."

"A storm! We'll run dry before we can get there!"

Whalon visibly stiffened. "You're speaking of my ship, Mr. Neilson!"

"Steam*boat* would be more accurate," I said drily. "Why is the Navy so heated up about this particular plane?"

The skipper eyed a passing squaw severely and after she'd passed spoke in a lowered tone. "This plane flew undeveloped photographs taken yesterday afternoon at Paramushiru, when the weather, for once, was clear."

"Why weren't they being flown overland to Washington?"

"They were being rushed down the coast to be put aboard a plane flying to Pearl Harbor. Something big must be stirring in the Pacific, and Nimitz wants a complete picture. So Attu didn't even waste time developing prints."

"Well, if the flying-boat sank, the films must now be useless."

"The commander thinks not, because they were sealed in oiled silk to prevent damage by humidity en route. We're to help find the Catalina so a Coast Guard tug sailing south from Wrangell under forced draft can raise it quickly, and the photos be sped on by another plane."

"We'll be a great help!"

"An intelligent observation," Whalon agreed, missing my sarcasm. "Apparently you're referring to Vitus Bering's discovery of Alaska in a vessel even smaller than the *Willow*. Yes, yes, she might do this job where larger ships would fail."

I gave up, knowing that if the tender's past performances could not shake his loyalty, arguments never would.

A TAXI rounded the corner of the lighthouse depot shop after we descended from the road to the dock, but I failed to notice the driver and didn't realize he was the one who had splashed us until we were gingerly working our way down the steep gangplank to the small-boat float where the *Willow* was moored. Our tall, slender coxswain, Shoemaker, was speaking to a man in a slicker.

Glancing up, Shoemaker said, "Here comes Captain Whalon, now."

Surprise flickered over the slightly sardonic face of the visitor, and a mocking expression entered his brown eyes. Despite the slicker he now wore, I knew it was the bosun's mate who had ignored Whalon's whistling.

The skipper strode briskly across the float, saying as he stepped over the gunwale, "All men aboard, Shoemaker? Good! Rout them out. We're sailing at once." Then he eyed the stranger frigidly.

"I'm Second Bosun's Mate Warren Rainey," the newcomer explained. His respectful tone didn't conceal a faintly cynical twitch of his lips. "Captain Wright ordered the *Cyane's* commander to transfer a bosun's mate to assist you in a search."

I got the picture. Sometimes a commander transfers a good man who just doesn't fit into his crew, but transfers are also a way of removing troublemakers. I had an idea Rainey was in the latter class.

"Didn't you hear me whistle when your taxi splashed me?" Whalon snapped.

Rainey might have given an excuse of being in a hurrry to carry out orders, but instead he looked at Whalon with disconcerting frankness.

"Yes, sir."

"Why didn't you stop, then?" the skipper asked gruffly.

"To be honest, sir, because I didn't expect we'd meet again."

I expected Whalon's boilers to burst, but instead he gave a short laugh, his eyes twinkling with amusement. "I'd have blistered the paint from your hull if you'd given any other answer, Mr. Rainey. Didn't they like you on the *Cyane?*"

"No, sir. I've been on ten cutters in the past four years."

"Can you think of any reason you were considered dispensable?"

"My superiors considered my attitude wrong, sir. They were right from their viewpoint, Mr. Whalon, but not from mine."

"Humph!" muttered Whalon, unimpressed. "Magellan's crews thought their commander's attitude wrong, but history records their error. . . . You can stow your gear in the foc'sle. There's a spare bunk."

"In the foc'sle! But I'm a warrant officer—"

"My first mate, Mr. Thorvald Neilson here, and I have the two topside cabins," Whalon interrupted curtly. "Fortunately, you have a fine lot of shipmates."

Rainey glanced around with a resentful eye. "I've reached the bottom at last!" he said bitterly. And picking up his sea-bag, he stalked

forward glumly, his lean face reflecting his distaste as he hesitated before swinging down into the dark foc'sle.

"You've got a headache on your hands, Captain," I remarked.

"Remember that Stephen Decatur's high spirits caused Captain Edward Peeble some misgivings when he fought the Tripoli pirates. But it was that same Decatur who sailed a captured ketch into the harbor to blow up the frigate *Philadelphia* the pirates had captured."

Maybe Whalon was trying to sell himself the idea he could make something of his new mate. He always believed his men were exceptional, and, after he'd trained them, they usually were. But I had a hunch the *Cyane's* commander knew what he was doing in sending us Rainey.

"Cast off!" Whalon ordered, starting forward. Two seamen jumped to the float to free hawsers, and two men on deck immediately coiled them. Even Rainey seemed impressed when he came topside, for Whalon refused to accept the smallness of our crew as an excuse for slackness.

The skipper was pushing the engine-room telegraph when I entered the wheelhouse, and foam spread astern as we backwatered. The quartermaster sent the wheel ticking in a quick arc. Whalon pushed the telegraph lever again. Presently we chugged past Ketchikan.

"Post lookouts port and starboard, Mr. Neilson, and suggest the importance of finding that Catalina flying-boat."

When I returned to the wheelhouse, Whalon asked me to radio the Ketchikan office to see if there were further orders. There were. A number of Navy and Coast Guard vessels were already searching in Clarence Straits; we were directed to proceed up an inlet some knots farther on which led into the village of Kasaan.

The bad weather was not yet general. A short distance north of Ketchikan the rain stopped and the sun came out dazzlingly bright. The air was velvety soft, and as we chugged along, our bow sent glassy swells rippling toward the heavily wooded shores. The improved weather made the crew optimistic, and men not on duty acted as volunteer lookouts. Perhaps Whalon was responsible for our feeling that the *Willow* displaced more water than larger ships, but you could sense a belief in the crew that the cutters and destroyers passing us were wasting their time because our tender would be the one to find the Catalina patrol boat.

WHEN not watching timbered slopes or the water, I instructed Rainey at the chart table. He had plenty to learn, but his mind snapped up things like a steel trap.

Whalon interrupted this instruction at noon, suggesting that I take Rainey aft to the first seating. The table was squeezed into a corner of the galley between bulkheads and seated only four. Chief Peterson had already started to chow down; he waved a big, genial paw at Rainey, his battered, homely old face breaking into a smile.

After we'd started to bail out our soup, Shoemaker came in and sat beside the chief. Rainey's spoon paused in mid-air.

"Isn't this seating an officers' mess?" he asked, pointedly.

For my money, Shoemaker was a mate's dream of an outstanding coxswain, and I wouldn't have offended him for anything. His lean face went scarlet as he started to rise.

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"I'm sorry, Mr. Rainey."

"Keep your seat, Shoemaker," I said, turning to the new mate. "Mr. Rainey, this tender has no warrant officers' mess, but if she were large enough to give her men the ranking they deserve, Shoemaker would be at that mess."

Rainey shrugged. "Apparently the *Willow* makes her own rules."

Shoemaker looked uncomfortable, and said nothing during the remainder of the meal. Nor did the chief. But Rainey wasn't content with one break. He commented caustically about the soggy meat pie. The fireman was not a cook; Towne had volunteered for the unpleasant duty, and in time learned to prepare a plain meal. It was when he tried something special that he went wrong. I knew he'd prepared the meat pie as a special treat for the new mate. His thick neck burned a dull red at Rainey's comments, and he looked as if he were in a frame of mind to resign his cooking duties and devote himself exclusively to the black gang.

I asked Rainey to walk back to the fantail with me, and relieved the lookout so we could speak in privacy. I explained that every member of the crew was doing double or triple duty because of the smallness of the tender. "They're not squawking because they're doing their part to win the war."

Mockery flickered through Rainey's brown eyes. "If the Japs knew they were up against the *Willow*, they'd commit hara-kiri, Mr. Neilson."

"She sank a Jap sub, Mr. Rainey. And she'll be doing an even bigger job if she finds the Catalina she's searching for."

"Drop the boots' lectures," said Rainey. "I'll do my job—on the chance of boosting my rank, if for no other reason."

Feeling mad enough to strike him, I asked, "Why'd you enlist?"

"Selective service had gone through," said Rainey, with a cynical twitch of his lips, "and I'm allergic to foxholes."

"Was that your only reason for enlisting?" I demanded hotly.

Something flashed through Rainey's eyes, and his face twitched. "What do you think?" And he turned on his heel.

Going forward to the wheelhouse, I felt both mad and depressed. I saw why Rainey hadn't been popular on other ships.

That afternoon the clouds mobilized, and a combined drizzle and murky fog soon made visibility so poor that Whalon let go the hook an hour before dark. The bad weather continued during the two days we explored the inlet leading into Kasaan, often making it necessary to lower the whaleboat so that low shorelines could be searched for wreckage. Shoemaker claimed that Rainey handled the whaleboat extremely well in several squalls, and he certainly wasn't prejudiced in the new mate's favor.

But Rainey's capable performances in this and other ways still didn't conceal the fact that he was uncooperative in some way you couldn't put your finger on. Discipline was strict on the *Willow* and Rainey couldn't seem to reconcile this with the informal friendliness existing between officers and men when they weren't on watch. The men sensed that Rainey didn't approve of our off-watch informality, and a cleavage which had never before existed was starting between officers and men. Particularly was it evident in the way the men emphasized the *Mr.* in addressing Rainey.

I imagined Whalon was too deeply submerged in thoughts of frigates and brigs and Revolutionary War naval battles to realize what was going on, but one night after we'd tied up to a small cannery dock, he entered my cabin and dropped on the bunk.

"A dozen Ketchikan high-school girls are all the workers this little cannery could get this summer," he began. "Shoemaker asked permission to give a dance, and would like you to take charge."

"Nan's pretty enough for me, Captain, and I don't want Dickie hearing about his dad prancing around with a bunch of chicks."

"Fine!" said Whalon. "Then I'll put Rainey in charge. He isn't hitting it off too well, and it would be good if the men knew him better."

"If they do, they may murder him. Maybe, after all, I'd better—"

"Mr. Neilson, that's disloyalty to a shipmate! Perhaps you've forgotten how unpopular Perry was until his squadron defeated the British on the Great Lakes in 1813. There's good stuff in Rainey!"

I looked incredulously at the Old Man, but he was quite serious.

Whalon went back to his cabin to study a new book he'd bought on naval strategy. I was trying to bring in something besides static on my radio when I heard music coming from the dock. When curiosity got the better of me, I stepped outside. The *Willow* was so small that the gangplank was laid from topside the wheelhouse to the dock guard-block—not that I had any inkling then that her position could later lead to trouble.

CROSSING the plank, I saw that the dance was being held in the dock passage between two of the red cannery buildings. A box of soap powder nearby explained how the planking had been made slippery enough for dancing. Overhead a single flickering light cast its dim illumination over the unusual dance.

Most canneries employ Eskimos or half-breeds, but this cannery had signed up a whole group of 'teen-agers whose fairness suggested Scandinavian descent. They wore clean and neatly-pressed slacks, and many of them were as pretty as movie starlets. They outnumbered

our men, and three of the spare girls sat on an overturned whaleboat, playing a pair of accordions and a guitar. When a seaman asked one of the musicians to dance, another girl picked up her instrument and went on playing. All played well; probably there wasn't any other means of amusing themselves at this lonely spot.

To my amazement, Rainey was dancing and obviously enjoying himself. He was chatting glibly to a little honey-blonde while executing a series of intricate steps that sometimes caused other dancers to stop and watch admiringly. He was doing all right; already he'd thawed some of the men's coolness. Puzzled by this unexpected side of him, I watched for a few minutes before returning aboard to sack in.

Several hours later I was awakened by picturesque and highly-accented cursing. Hastily slipping into pants and pea-jacket, I stepped out on deck. From its position just a little higher than the dock's guard-block, the ship's searchlight blazed brilliantly down the passage between the cannery buildings, like a night club spotlight but many times as bright. It went out at that moment.

Hurrying into the wheelhouse, I found Whalon trying to calm Peterson. The chief lapsed into Swedish to find words sufficiently expressive of his wrath, but I finally gathered that he'd made a final check before sacking in and discovered a heavy discharge on the ammeter. As the engines were stopped, the current was supplied by a bank of storage batteries, and Peterson was afraid they were now run down.

"Py gosh!" the chief exploded. "Vat the hell I going to do if ve ordered out of here in a hurry, eh? I'll damned vell get demoted to viper, nearly."

"We're going nowhere until morning," Whalon said, "and meanwhile you can start the engines."

And to reassure Peterson, the skipper switched on the radio. After a blur of static, he stiffened as he heard a voice say, "The following cutters will sail to Clarence Straits at once and make contact with the Coast Guard salvage tug *Qualmar* which has located the object of search." The *Qualmar* was an old Navy tug which had been loaned to the Coast Guard for salvage operations in Alaskan waters. There followed the names of six cutters and our tender. "Call back at once if you receive this message."

"*Qualmar!*" said a voice, and I turned to find Rainey behind me.

"Did you turn on that searchlight?" snapped Whalon, as he switched the radio to sending.

"Yes, sir," replied Rainey. "The cannery light was poor."

"Py gosh, you used up all my juice!" Peterson fumed.

"Sorry, Chief." But the twitch of Rainey's lips suggested that our misfortune amused him. "I didn't know."

"You know now!" Whalon said gruffly.

He reported to the office that our sailing might be delayed. He looked annoyed as he tuned off the radio. Rarely did he offer excuses, even though accomplishing anything with our atrociously designed tender was in the nature of a miracle.

"Think of Old Lady Pritchard finding that Catalina!" said Rainey. "He must have found it before dark, and now wants some ships to make a lee so he can hold position while raising it."

"You're probably right, Mr. Rainey, but your reference to Lieutenant Pritchard is in questionable taste."

"Bah!" snorted Peterson. "I bet my batteries is dead!"

And he sent up the fireman a minute later to report that they were completely burned out. Ordinarily Rainey's use of the searchlight would not have been serious. We could have sailed as soon as we had steam in the boilers, and the generators would have built up another charge in the batteries. But Rainey had burned the light so long that a new set of batteries must be installed.

Long after we had steam up, Peterson reported on the speaking tube that the batteries were not yet installed, and at last Whalon sent me below to learn why. Space was scarce on the *Willow* and no one could have foreseen any immediate need for new batteries, so they had been stowed in the hold below dozens of steel acetylene-gas tanks, which we used in recharging automatic lights. Retrieving the batteries took a long time because the tanks were heavy, and by the time they were installed our overly large engines had burned so much fuel that Peterson insisted we must replenish oil and water before sailing. Whalon awakened the cannery superintendent and requisitioned enough to fill our small tanks. Our sailing was delayed by a good two hours.

To make matters worse, there was a strong blow by the time we reached Clarence Straits. The seas were dappled with spindrift, and the *Willow* took green water over her bow. Heavily rolling cutters sailed past us as we steamed up the straits, and it was nearly eleven before we sighted the *Qualmar,* jerking at her anchor chains and quite alone.

"They must have abandoned salvage operations until the weather moderates," Whalon guessed, ordering the quartermaster to swing along her lee side.

ON HER deck, watching men assemble gear, stood a pudgy, bull-necked man in dungarees. I recognized him from his childishly round face and slightly popping eyes as Lieutenant Ferris Pritchard, commander of the

tug. Employed in a minor executive position by a salvage concern before the war, he had received a Coast Guard commission on the strength of it.

Whalon stepped out on the bridge, but before he could speak, Pritchard roared at him, "What in hell's the idea of getting here late, Bosun?"

"I reported I'd be delayed sailing, sir."

"Did you report you were taking your own sweet time?" Pritchard demanded furiously. Apparently the bad weather had curdled a disposition notoriously touchy. "Have you any excuse for arriving here after every other ship has come and gone?"

"No, sir," said Whalon, stiffening. "None whatsoever."

Rainey turned from the chart table, his eyes puzzled. "Why doesn't Captain Whalon explain it was my fault for turning on the searchlight?"

I caught his arm as he started toward the door. "Let the skipper handle this!"

"So you have no excuse?" Pritchard badgered Whalon, sarcastically. "Bosun, you and your damned shiftless bunch of freshwater seamen—"

Whalon's eyes blazed, and when he interrupted, his voice had the stern ring of an angry admiral's. "One minute, Lieutenant! Blame me all you wish, but my men are not shiftless and you'll either apologize to them or I'll put you on report."

"You'll *what?*" Pritchard's face went red with fury.

"Put you on report," repeated the skipper, with the air of a man quite sure of his rights and determined to stand on them.

In the swift expansion of the armed forces, it was inevitable that a few men like Pritchard fell into positions of command. Usually they hung themselves and in time were assigned routine duties, given discharges, or placed where they could do little damage. Pritchard's undeniable competence in salvage work had so far saved him—but he should never have been put over other men.

Rainey was having a struggle. I saw him swallow, stiffen; saw emotion flicker through his face, through eyes no longer mocking. He started purposefully toward the door. "The Old Man can't get away with this. I'm going to tell Pritchard—"

I gripped his arm, hard. "Stay out of this, Mr. Rainey. The Old Man doesn't pass the buck!"

Rainey tried to jerk away. "But he'll get a deck court—"

"Not Whalon! He knows the Good Book—the rules and regulations—better than most admirals. Pritchard bullied the wrong warrant officer."

Pritchard was beginning to realize he was on insecure ground. Even with the yards separating the two vessels, I saw his round, childish face going scarlet. Starting to speak, he choked and coughed, and finally gave a short, harsh laugh.

"Perhaps I spoke hastily, Bosun—"

Whalon interrupted curtly, "Do you apologize to my men, Lieutenant?"

The lieutenant's heavy neck grew congested. "I'll be damned if I'll—"

"Mr. Neilson," the skipper barked, and I stepped hastily on deck. "Lieutenant Pritchard seems to be unaware that the men of our service enjoy protection from undeserved abuse. The day of *White Jacket* and *Two Years Before the Mast* are fortunately past. Please contact the office. I'm placing the lieutenant on report."

I started toward the wheelhouse radio when Pritchard called hoarsely, "Wait!" It was hard for him to get out the next words. "I regret my remarks. They were unfair. I retract what I said."

"I accept your apology for my men," Whalon said calmly. "Now, Lieutenant, how can I assist you in raising the Catalina?"

"It's below me on a shelf, likely to slip into deeper water if these seas keep building up. Only a fool would attempt to raise it, though, until the weather moderates. You may do what you damned please."

Pritchard turned and disappeared into the wheelhouse.

Shoemaker and two other seamen stared at Whalon with shining eyes, but he stood aloof and thoughtful, watching the tug weigh anchor. He stepped inside as she started southward.

"Only a fool would attempt to raise it!" he repeated gruffly. "Only a fool would enter Mobile Bay, but Admiral Farragut won a great battle by doing it!"

I felt uneasy. Whalon would never acknowledge the *Willow's* limitations. I remembered when he'd pulled out our towing bitt trying to pull a 10,000-ton cargo ship off a reef. After that experience, Dickie noticed my first gray hairs.

"But, Captain, with our small winch and this blow—"

"Ha!" snorted Whalon. "Farragut said, 'Damn the torpedoes!' And I say, 'Damn the weather!' I must confess, Mr. Neilson, that man Pritchard annoyed me. But he did say to do what I damned please."

I tried to steer the skipper's thoughts from the tug commander, but failed. It's hard to budge a man who reads mostly about successful historical characters. History books say little about the men who failed trying to do jobs too big for their ships.

We rolled and pitched so wildly that the quartermaster was having trouble staying on the duckboard, but at that moment a motor fishing-boat—a purse-seiner, judging by the net on her after-deck—came down the straits, bobbing even more violently than the *Willow*.

"Lay a shot across her bow!" Whalon cried,

apparently aroused from some historical memory. Then, realizing what he'd said, he coughed, and frowned at the quartermaster. "Three points starboard."

As we turned toward the motor boat, Whalon jerked the cord twice. Our horn sounded two long blasts. The Old Man stepped outside with a megaphone as we closed water. The skipper of the motor boat stepped out on deck, cupping his hand to his ear.

"How's fishing?" Whalon shouted.

"Lousy, Captain."

"I'd like to requisition your net."

"Take the damned thing. It's ripped to hell. Lost me a big catch of humpbacks."

WHALON asked the net's value, directed the coxswain to find a lead weight, and then he went into his cabin to write out a requisition. We made a lee so the motor boat could work in closer. The skipper reappeared, tied the requisition slip to a lead weight and tossed it aboard the other boat. But bringing the purse seine aboard wasn't easy. We tried hoisting it aboard with our small winch, but the fishermen were afraid we'd damage their boat and kept veering away. Finally we cast a weighted line to the boat. With it, we established a heavier line to the fishing boat. Then, securing this line around the drum of the "wildcat" at the stern, we heaved the net aboard.

Rainey's eyes questioned me as the men straightened out the borrowed fishing gear on deck.

"Don't ask me," I said. "The Old Man has requisitioned some cockeyed things, but when the office sees this one, someone will blow his top-hamper."

The skipper came aft, rubbing his hands with satisfaction.

"Providence was with us, Mr. Neilson!" He glanced at Shoemaker, who, in addition to his other duties, was leadsman. "Take soundings as we go in, Shoemaker."

"Yes, sir."

When I went forward, Shoemaker was still heaving the lead and reporting no bottom, but presently he sang out, "Quar-ter twelve, sir!"

Shoemaker reported ten fathoms, eight, then six, and finally no bottom again. Whalon tried a point west, and we picked up the shelf once more at five fathoms. But at the next cast, Shoemaker ran into trouble; he started to report four, then three fathoms. Then, jerking and pulling at the line, he started aft trying to clear it.

"Line fouled, sir!" he bawled.

Whalon pushed the engine-room telegraph, and we took sheets of water as we backwatered. I stepped outside. Shoemaker was at the stern, still trying to free his line, which was now astern.

"The line's still fouled, Captain," he called.

"Good! Secure a keg buoy to it to mark the spot."

It was low tide and logs were piled high on a small crescent beach, above which were several dead, weather-silvered trees. Whalon claimed these landmarks identified the beach above the spot where the tug had anchored.

After the float was made fast to the sounding line, we chugged in slow circles while Whalon and I peered over the plunging bow. It was lucky we were there, for we sighted an uncharted spear of rock that would have pierced our hull if the skipper hadn't roared, "Hard a-port!" We dimly made out a giant plane

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under water a dozen yards farther on, and over to starboard.

"Now if that wasn't the damnedest luck," Whalon said. "That flying boat must have been almost stopped when it struck that rock. Probably ripped her open, and she sank before anyone could escape."

"We found her. Now what do we do?"

"Remove the floats and then call all hands to heave the net overboard, Mr. Neilson."

"Captain," I groaned, "our winch—"

"Mr. Neilson," he snapped, "we'll need all hands!" So I went to the galley, calling the men aft.

Grunting and straining, we tumbled the net over the side, the line secured to it rippling off its coil until it reached the knot Whalon had bent around the towing bitt. Rainey's dark brows lifted questioningly, but I shrugged, puzzled, myself. Whalon now ordered the quartermaster to turn circles around the bobbing red keg buoy until the line astern grew taut, and we churned the seas as if moored to a dock.

"The purse seine is all fouled around the plane and so is most of our heavy line, Captain," I said, as he pushed the telegraph lever.

"Please let go the bow anchor, Mr. Neilson. I don't want to part our line."

This done, Whalon glanced at the line and remarked that he was going to catch up on some reading. He disappeared into his cabin, without giving us any clue to his plans. The explanation came when the tide rose. The towing bitt creaked and the line began showing the strain. The stern sat heavily in the running seas, water seething along our scuppers.

Rainey was the first to guess. "The skipper's using the tide to raise the Catalina. It can exert more force than any winch. But will the line take the strain?"

"Counting on water buoyancy, it just might."

But I wasn't very hopeful, for with the weight pulling us down, the seas smashed the tender like battering rams. A miserable half hour later, the *Willow* lurched a little, settled, then seemed to take the seas easier. We snapped heavily at the anchor chain. *We were lifting the Catalina!*

Whalon must have felt the slight lift. Bustling into the wheelhouse, he ordered me to weigh anchor. We steamed closer to shore until the flying-boat dragged. Then the Old Man ordered the hook let go and the line dogged down tightly, before returning to his reading.

Thus in slow stages Whalon used the tide to raise the flying-boat. But the third time we had moved the Catalina shoreward, we grazed a rock the lookout couldn't see through the breakers. When we backwatered, it happened. The *Willow* shuddered and shook as though pounding a reef. The engines were stopped by Peterson before Whalon could order them shut off.

I ran aft, finding Shoemaker already there. "I hadn't time to take up slack. Now the line's fouled our propeller, Mr. Neilson."

WHALON'S face clouded when I told him. I ran to the forward capstan and let go the forward anchor. But now with slack on the line, which we couldn't take up, we swung about, jerking at our anchor chain.

"Captain," I said, "it was a swell idea, but we've got to cut that plane loose or low tide will catch us without any engines."

It was a wrench for Whalon to concede defeat, but finally he nodded soberly. "Afraid you're right."

Rainey, who'd been very quiet since our brush with the lieutenant, said, "Captain, I'd like to try something else first."

We didn't guess what he was planning until he jerked off his boots. All his clothes except his shorts followed.

"I appreciate your intention, Mr. Rainey," Whalon said, "but I can't permit you to risk your life."

"The stern makes a lee, sir," Rainey pointed out, stepping outside.

I didn't think much of that lee when we followed him aft. It was true the anchor held the bow pointed into the running seas, but the stern was climbing and smashing down violently. I doubted whether anyone could cling to the rudder bar without dangerous risk.

Rainey hesitated several seconds, drew a long breath into a chest surprisingly well developed, and swung over the side on a rising swell. He caught the fouled line, pulling himself up enough to grip the rudder bar before the *Willow* descended. He had the devil's choice of letting go or sounding. His dark head vanished beneath the foam.

Rainey's cheek had been laid open and his hands were bleeding when the tender rose. Still clinging to the rudder bar, he tore at the fouled line. Whalon's compressed lips were white.

"Give him a line, Shoemaker. *Quick!*"

Either Rainey didn't see the line, or he chose to ignore it. The tender rose and fell again and again. Miraculously, the mate still kept his grip. But blood streamed down his cheek and neck, and his hands were gashed badly by the propeller. Whalon cried hoarsely, "Grab the line, Rainey!" each time the mate came up, but without attracting his attention. The mate's eyes were beginning to go blank.

Shoemaker's eyes glistened, and he made odd, circling motions with the light line as if trying by sheer will-power to make the injured mate understand. Another seaman's lips moved without making a sound. Whalon was drawing short, quick breaths; and I rubbed damp palms against my dungarees and cursed my inability to do anything.

On the next sea to roll under us, I saw that Rainey had released the rudder bar and clung to the heavy line. He had freed it! I tried to cheer, but instead of my usual slightly husky voice, the cry came out like the squeak of a frightened child. And Whalon didn't do much better when he tried to catch Rainey's attention.

"The line—look, Mr. Rainey, the line!"

The mate's glazed eyes focused momentarily on the dangling line. He grabbed at it, and we quickly swayed him over the side. His face and hands were lacerated, and his knees went rubbery when Whalon tried to lift him to his feet.

"Shoemaker, give me a hand! We'll get him down to the engine room. Mr. Neilson, take up the slack, quick!"

Before high tide failed us, we had the Catalina towed in past the breakers and the line secured to it made fast to a timber which we dropped overboard. I took the tender into deeper water before anchoring.

Then, after heaving our heaviest block-and-tackle into the whaleboat, we rowed ashore, picking up the timber and line on the way. The line was reeved through the block and then secured to a stout spruce. Taking advantage of water buoyancy, we heaved the Catalina a little higher before slack tide.

Later we had the unhappy duty of recovering the bodies of the Catalina crew, and the good fortune to find the photos of Paramushiru still safely sealed in their oilskin wrappings—but this had to await low tide. At the time we rowed back to the tender to chow down while waiting for the receding tide to uncover the flying-boat.

Whalon had just finished applying dressings and taking sutures to close the lacerations on Rainey's face and hands.

"By a lucky chance," he declared soberly, "I happened to study a book on ship's surgery."

I winked at Rainey. Chance failed to explain why the skipper knew things. He worked at it.

"Mr. Rainey," the Old Man went on, "the Navy will be grateful to you when we recover—er, certain invaluable cargo from the flying-boat. But why did you take such a risk?"

Rainey's attempt to grin was stopped by adhesive tape. "I'd come to think all higher-ups were stuffed shirts. When you proved me wrong by taking the blame for a delay I had caused—well, I wanted to back such a skipper to the limit."

"Humph!" said the Old Man. "You ever serve under Pritchard?"

Rainey's brows drew together. He nodded. "I enlisted when I saw a war coming, because I—I was damned keen about my country. I felt pretty emotional about it—serious and full of enthusiasm, you know. But Pritchard was my first skipper!"

"He killed all that enthusiasm?" Whalon asked gently.

His lips tightening, Rainey nodded. "Not only in me, but in a crew of mighty fine men. He knows his job, but he's one hell of a lousy officer. Some of us asked for transfers, and Pritchard thought I was behind the dissatisfaction. He made it plenty tough for me before I could get transferred to another ship. I was so fed up that I've been going through the motions ever since, without my heart in it. I'm mighty sorry, sir. I shouldn't blame the whole service for its Pritchards. I guess there aren't so many, after all."

He gazed so steadily at Whalon that the skipper turned pink and coughed to hide his embarrassment. I had to suppress a laugh. For once the Old Man could think of no historical parallel to cover the situation.

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER KUHLHOFF

Magurth freed his bayonet just in time to jump clear of the avalanche of earth and rubble the bulldozer sent crashing over, blocking the mouth of the cave.

MARINE Privates Deal and Magurth squatted on their heels and gave their undivided attention to an extremely vague map which First Sergeant Keegan of the Bull Bats was tracing with a finger in the sand.

"Somewheres up around here," Sergeant Keegan was saying, "there's an air strip. The dope is the slopeheads has pulled out, but I ain't taking chances on walking into a trap. It's up to you two guys to find out and get word back to me, pronto."

Sergeant Keegan referred to the handsome watch strapped to his left wrist—a watch, by the way, with two stop-watch hands on it and one of the sergeant's most prized possessions. "I'm giving you two hours. Case something happens you can't get back, do as much shooting as you can so's I'll hear it."

Privates Deal and Magurth nodded dutifully and rose to set forth on their advance patrol mission.

"One other thing," warned Sergeant Keegan. "If you run onto a cache of beer, lay off. It's gotta be inspected and pronounced fit for human consumption by a properly constituted authority."

Privates Deal and Magurth both nodded with that open-souled innocence any Bull Bat can muster for such an occasion without the slightest effort, and set forth on their mission.

Once safely beyond the slightest chance of recall by Sergeant Keegan, Private Deal said to Magurth, "Two hours, the sergeant said we was to report back. What time is it now?"

"About five minutes after one," answered Magurth, glancing at his own strapwatch whose hands stood at exactly one o'clock. "But don't ask me again, because this thing don't work. I just set it by the sergeant's while he was looking at his, so's he wouldn't pick two other guys what had a working watch between 'em."

All of which is by way of explaining the presence of Private Deal and his star-gauged

BEER PATROL

By

RAY MILLHOLLAND

Springfield sniper's rifle and Magurth with his murderous bayonet affixed to his Garand M1 as they squatted face to face, a short time later, on a Pacific island trail. As the advance patrol of the main body of the Bull Bats, hot on the heels of an elusive detachment of the enemy,

they had met, after a brief separation, at this rendezvous to exchange information.

MAGURTH took a drag from a cigarette cupped in his hairy fingers and said in an undertone, "No use looking behind you, kid. That noise was only a lizard. . . How old was the Jap sign you saw over on your side?"

Private Deal nursed his Springfield on his lap while his eyes followed the flight of a startled bird, so far behind Magurth that it was a mere speck against the cloud-mottled sky.

"Just a dead one," answered Deal, now watching for a second bird. "Sitting with his back to a tree and a bottle of beer between his knees."

"Where's the beer?" demanded Magurth, his eyes taking a thirsty inventory of all possible places of concealment about Deal's person.

"Still wired to the slickest booby trap I've seen yet." Deal broke off, lifting a finger for complete silence. He listened intently. The faint throb of an internal combustion engine laboring over obstacles pulsated the still air. "Tank or something headed this way," he announced to Magurth.

"Yeah, I'm hearing it," said Magurth without turning to look. He produced a hand grenade, and handed it to Deal in silence, then produced another one.

"Keegan said if we run into tank sign, one of us was to fall back and report," mused Deal, rolling the grenade in his palm without looking at it. "You'd better shove off. If it's only one, I'll get the driver through his slit and toss this in when the others open the lid."

"I only hear one," insisted Magurth. "No use bothering Keegan with it. Anyways, I'll stick around until I see how many."

The pair separated. Deal vanished into the brush on the left side of the trail, Magurth doing likewise to the right. The throb of the laboring motor grew louder, until the clank of its tracks could be heard. This was not dense jungle country but rolling woodland, with here and there open patches of undergrowth no higher than a man's head.

Looking across such an open patch, Private Deal saw a tall but slender tree shudder from the impact of some powerful force. It seemed to recover from the impact, momentarily. Then there was the angry snarl of an internal combustion engine and the rumbling growl of gears and track treads. The tree shuddered again, then slowly leaned toward the clearing, stubbornly resisting the inevitable as one by one its tough young roots cracked like pistol shots.

The branches of the prostrate tree were still quivering on the ground when the curved steel prow of a Seabee Diesel-powered bulldozer shouldered its way out into the open. Seated up at the driver's controls was a knobby-featured, bull-shouldered man in Navy battle-dress. He stopped his grinding, charging monster, to turn about and sight back over his route. Then, as if correcting a small error in his previous line of progress, he nudged his track controls upon a new bearing slightly to his starboard hand and came charging on.

When he came abreast of the pair of Bull Bats who had been watching his approach with lynx-like intentness, Magurth stepped into view. The bulldozer lurched to a halt and the driver leaned forward and nodded downward at Magurth.

"Hey, Mac, how much farther to that gook air strip?"

Magurth jerked his head in the opposite direction from whence he and Deal had come. "Two hundred miles, swabbie, and most of it water a mile deep or better."

The Seabee bulldozer driver scraped his sleeve across his sweating brow and reached for his controls. "Thanks, Mac. I gotta get a hump on or the skipper'll think I been playing under the apple tree with a cute hula dancer."

Then Private Deal spoke. "That's right, swabbie, there's no air strip ahead of the way you're pointing on this island."

Magurth, who had been frowning at the path of desolation and destruction left by the bulldozer said, "Where you brung that thing from, anyways?"

"From the beachhead, back yonder about three miles."

"Just like that, you drive that thing smack through the whole damn Jap army," commented Private Deal. "I wish they'd let a Marine do that, and we'd be in Tokyo by now and this lousy war over with."

Magurth, resting his hairy, sweat-glistening arms on one of the links of the ponderous machine's track belts, said, "Y'mean, swabbie, no yellow-belly so much as took a shot at you?"

"That reminds me of something," said the burly Seabee bulldozer driver, reaching down and pulling a stubby carbine from its leather boot. He clanked the bolt mechanism and let it snap home with that metallic sound indicating its magazine was empty. "Either of you guys got any hulls to fit this thing? I burned all mine on a dug-in machine-gun nest."

Deal shook his head. "That thing shoots shorts. All we carry is thirty-long stuff."

"Y'mean," demanded Magurth, "y' waded into a gook machine-gun crew with just that chipmunk gun and knocked 'em all for a ghoul?"

The big Seabee of the knobby features slapped the metal side of the driver's seat and said, "No, with Herman the Vermin here. I just raised the blade out front, so's they couldn't sprinkle me, and ran over the dump. I held this little gun here out, so's she would shoot around the end of my scraper, and kept kicking dirt in their faces. Then I drops the blade when I

gets close and pushes 'em under about five cubic yards of mud and stumps." He jerked his thumb casually over his shoulder. "If you want some prisoners, you'd better shake a leg. About a mile back yonder, and I bet they ain't dug out by now. Where'd you say that air strip was from here?"

Magurth flicked a look across at Private Deal. "What d'you say, kid, we board this bone-shaker and show the man some scenery?"

WITHOUT prompting, Private Deal climbed up beside the driver, cradling his star-gauged Springfield sniper's rifle in the crook of his arm. Magurth came next, and found no place to sit but on a folded tarpaulin with many protruding hard lumps under it.

"What's under this, a case of beer?" he demanded.

"Naw, a gook machine gun and a box of am'nition from back there," answered the driver. "Now somebody point where this air strip is at and we'll be on our way. The skipper is sure going to be on his ear."

"We been every place you ain't been off that way," said Magurth, pointing a grimy finger north-northwest. "It's gotta be over there if there is any such place."

The big Diesel motor snarled and the bulldozer lumbered off in the indicated direction, its thick, curved steel scraper blade raised to clear minor ground obstructions. Private Deal enjoyed a feeling of deep satisfaction over the ease with which he was now smashing straight through underbrush without having to exert so much as the muscles of an eyebrow.

"This is the way to hunt yellow-bellies," commented Magurth. "If they ain't one place, you can look for 'em some other place without walking your legs off like a Army dogface." He pointed to rising ground about three hundred yards ahead, slightly to the left of their course. "Let's ride up there and rubberneck the joint. If we're anywheres near your air strip, we should see it from there."

Conversation had to be carried on by shouting to be heard over the roar of the Diesel and the crashing clank of the bulldozer's caterpillar treads. The big Seabee driver merely nodded and accommodatingly changed course slightly.

Halfway up the slope, Private Deal said, "Sergeant Keegan will sure be on his ear if we don't find any Japs for him to fight," but he did not say it loud enough to be heard over the noise of the bulldozer, so it drew no comment from Magurth.

Magurth reached up and tugged the driver's sleeve. "Easy on popping over the top of this rise and making us look like the United States Cavalry to the rescue in a horse opera. These ain't Hollywood Japs hired to run when we let out a yell."

Just below the crest of the rise, the bulldozer driver stopped his machine and stood up on his seat.

"Yeah, there's my air strip down there, all right," he announced. "And by the looks of things, me and Herman the Vermin is here first for oncet. That'll knock the skipper for a loop. He's always crabbing and knocking his gums if I don't keep up with a jeep on a flat road."

Next, Magurth stood up and gave the scene a swift survey with his combat-practiced eye.

"Swabbie, it's a good thing you drove this mud puppy up here from the wrong side of the tracks. There's a whole battalion of them yellow monkeys burning plenty machine-gun am'nition at your friend the skipper. Sergeant Keegan will sure be hard to live with if he misses this."

Magurth tapped Private Deal on the shoulder.

"Lam it on back and tell 'im. But make sure you get back our liberty cards before you can remember just where you left me and Navy, here." Magurth's reference to their liberty cards concerned disciplinary measures which had been taken by the sergeant as reprisal for a certain roast duck which had vanished between the galley and the officers' table the day before, when the transport bearing the Bull Bats was standing off the landing beach awaiting the order to go ashore.

Private Deal looked back over the trail of smashed and twisted underbrush made by the bulldozer and said, "I could do it a lot quicker if I drove this thing back."

"In a pig's mind! I got a picture of you driving this piece of complicated machinery," retorted the bulldozer driver, with lofty superiority. He waved inclusively to the multiplicity of levers and hydraulic control valves surrounding the driver's position. "It takes more brains just to keep this thing going in a straight line that it does to fly upside-down and backwards, all at the same time, in a P-38."

"You may be bloated with brains, swabbie," commented Magurth, rebukingly, "but don't sound off in front of Marines about it. It takes more brains to be a buck Marine than the man's got who invented this thunder-buggy you been driving."

"I suppose you can drive it?" inquired the big Seabee.

"Even this kid Marine here can drive it, I mean," retorted Magurth, thumbing toward Deal, in a tone which implied he personally could drive two of them at once if necessary.

Just then, from the other side of the rise, an unseen Jap mortar belched. The shell from it arched high in its flight across the air strip and exploded in the fringe of trees beyond.

"There wasn't supposed to be nobody here to fight us," complained the Seabee bulldozer driver.

The Jap mortar belched again, and again

there was an explosion on the far side of the air strip. Magurth wiped the sweat from his palms across his stomach and said, "The only way to stop a war is dish out more of it than the other guy's got the guts to take. You're fresh out of hulls for your shooter, swabbie, so you stay here where it's safe, against I can borrow a Jap gun for you." Magurth looked around for Private Deal, but Deal's place was vacant. Magurth ursed to the Seabee. "That's how we train 'em in the Marines. An order gets obeyed, *zip!* like that. All's we gotta do is hold this battalion of yellow-bellies for a couple of hours, then we can set back against a tree and watch better fighting than you ain't never seen, swabbie, when Sergeant Keegan and the Bull Bats takes over."

With a parting warning to the bulldozer driver to keep out of sight, Magurth dropped to his belly and slithered up the last few yards to the crest of the rise. There he paused, unshaven chin resting on his hairy arms, while he looked down and studied the Jap mortar position not fifty yards below. He counted the number of the crew carefully, then searched out the cleverly camouflaged mouth of a small cave being used as an ammunition dump.

He counted five little brown men efficiently serving their deadly mortar. How many more were in the cave, he could only guess. Maybe just one—and maybe, again, a dozen. It was a chance a man had to take.

MAGURTH dug out his one hand grenade, thinking regretfully that he should have frisked Deal for the one he had before sending the kid back for Sergeant Keegan. He released the pin on his grenade, holding it long enough to make sure it could not be picked up after landing and tossed away before it exploded, and lobbed it neatly into the midst of the mortar crew below.

Flattened to the ground to avoid fragments from his own grenade, Magurth heard the sharp report of a .30-06 rifle a split second before the louder crash of his grenade. He was on his feet, charging for the entrance to the cave, bayonet poised, when a bullet snapped past within inches of his ear.

A half-naked Jap collapsed in the cave mouth. Instantly another enemy appeared, firing his rifle indiscriminately as he came. This man, too, went down as another bullet snapped past Magurth's ear.

Then came a yell from behind him. "Sheer off to the right, Magurth, you're damn head's in the way—" *Crash!* Another Jap dropped in the cave entrance, almost blocking it.

By that time, Magurth was close enough to catch the fourth Jap on his bayonet point, which he freed by a quick, grunting jerk and a powerful thrust of his heel, sending the body hurtling back on the pile. Another enemy, trying to crawl through the remaining restricted opening, suddenly jerked from the impact of a bullet and lay still.

"Watch 'em, Magurth," came the second warning from Deal. "I counted six more that ain't come out yet."

Then from above came the hoarse bellow of the big Diesel bulldozer, accompanied by the grinding of its steel blade and the snapping of roots and the rumble of earth in motion.

"Stand clear, below!"

Magurth just had time to jump aside before several cubic yards of earth and rubble avalanched down the slope, completely blocking the mouth of the cave. Several times the bulldozer retreated from the crest of the hill, only to return again, pushing still more earth down the slope, until literally tons of it blocked the cave mouth. Then the huge steel monster teetered over the edge and came rumbling down the new grade it had just created.

Magurth nodded grudging approval at the bulldozer as it came to a halt and its Seabee driver looked upon his handiwork. "See me next payday, swabbie, and I'll buy that gadget off you."

Just then Private Deal appeared from around the other side of the bulldozer. Magurth frowned and said, "Soon's I get time, I'm going to beat your ears off for not obeying orders."

Ignoring the threat, Deal pointed out across the air strip. "Look what's coming our way."

The Seabee driver took one look at a widely extended line of Jap skirmishers running toward them, jumped from his driver's seat and picked up a rifle lying near the trench mortar. Deal sat down, dug steadying holes for his heels and proceeded to pick off the leaders of the attack with methodical precision. Magurth fired a full clip from his Garand without effect.

Deal said over his shoulder, "Keep that thing quiet, Magurth. You can't do no good with it till they get within four hundred yards." Deal paid no attention to the Seabee who was squibbing off his Jap rifle and kicking up little puffs of dust without getting any effective results.

Magurth reloaded and walked over to the Jap trench mortar, which he righted on its overturned tripod, and, after brushing off some of the dirt and adjusting the elevator screw, imperturbably plopped a shell down the barrel and watched it soar almost vertically upward. The shell landed some twenty yards ahead of the advancing line of attackers. When the dust drifted away, there was a gaping hole in the line. But Magurth had already shifted elevation and was impersonally watching another shell on its way. The second shell exploded with as much effectiveness as the first.

Magurth straightened up to admire his handiwork. "Two cigars I win in two shots. If I only had a coupla more, I could break up this war right now."

The Seabee had been firing his Jap rifle so fast that an empty cartridge case fused in the chamber. He sat down to beat on the bolt knob with a stone and to curse the half-baked bunch of mechanics who made such junk.

Meanwhile, Private Deal, taking time between shots to blow through his rifle barrel, was dropping advancing Japs with clocklike regularity.

"Hey, Magurth," he said, turning his chin away from his rifle stock, "ain't it time you quit playing with souvenirs and began working that Garand? There's too damn many for me, and they don't seem tired of coming, either."

Magurth retrieved his rifle from where he had left it leaning against a tree and took a nonchalant offhand shot. His bullet kicked up dust some twenty yards ahead of the straggling line of savage little men, but the ricochet connected just the same, and a man dropped.

"That's how you made Marksman," said Deal, professionally disgusted at such a sloppy method of hitting the target. "Half your fours and fives hit the dirt and keyholed into the target paper. I know because I was pasting for you."

"You ain't learned all there is about a rifle," tossed back Magurth. "Now watch this." He snapped another shot. It, too, hit in front of the advancing line.

"Magurth's second shot for record got Maggie's drawers," droned Private Deal, alluding to the fact that a miss is scored from the target pits by waving a red flag in front of the target.

"You noticed three of 'em has stopped to dig gravel outta their eyes," retorted Magurth, unruffled. "They might just as well be dead for all the trouble they'll give us this afternoon."

He continued firing and dropped one more man with his next six shots.

DEAL'S rifle was now cool enough to resume firing. He went to work as if he had all afternoon to shoot his string on a target range, instead of having to shoot for his life.

"Looks like we're gonna have about twenty of 'em get within bay'net distance," observed Magurth as he slapped home a fresh clip. He turned his head to address the Seabee, still vainly struggling to pound the Jap rifle bolt open with a stone. "You'd better find a bay'net to hang on that thing. We're going to have visitors."

The Seabee paused with the rock half-raised for another blow on his jammed rifle bolt, to stare, fascinated, at the advancing skirmish line. They were clever jungle fighters. They crouched low when they were on their feet and moved forward zigzagging unexpectedly, eliciting explosive curses from Deal because he was missing too many shots.

The Seabee licked his lips and said, "Why don't they rush us and have it over with, 'stead of doing all that parade ground stuff of crawling most of the way on their bellies?"

Deal just then blistered a finger on the scorching hot receiver of his star-gauged Springfield and grumbled, "This is one hell of a way to treat a fine gun. I bet I've shot out half the rifling between the chamber and my sling swivel band."

While Magurth was slapping his last clip into his Garand, he nodded at the bush knife in a sheath on the Seabee's belt. "Them yellow-bellies are fixing to take us alive and have some fun. Don't let 'em take that away from you if you want to get it over with quick."

"Anybody got the time?" asked the Seabee.

Automatically, Magurth looked at his watch and said, "One o'clock— hell, I forgot it's busted. I don't know what time it is, swabbie."

The Seabee shook his head. "Something's gone haywire. The skipper said every piece of equipment was supposed to be working on this air strip by 1300 today. If he was here on time, we wouldn't be in this jam."

"Lookit," said Deal, pointing across the air strip. "More coming our way."

Little figures came popping out of the brush along the air strip like rabbits driven before a line of game beaters. There was the shrill scream of high-speed gears, punctuated by the chatter of machine guns. Then a motorized detachment of Seabees burst out into the open. From every vehicle a stream of machine-gun fire was searching out the little running figures and enveloping them in spurts of yellow dust. The enemy skirmish line which had been advancing on Privates Deal and Magurth and their Seabee companion broke into a run for the far end of the field.

"Funny how them monkeys act when they're scared," commented Magurth, professionally. "Now, the quickest way to cover was right at us—sitting here with no am'nition to stop 'em. No, they gotta run eight hundred yards due north in the open. And lookit the way them Seabee machine guns are laying it on 'em."

Suddenly, the panic-stricken enemy stopped in headlong flight and started running back toward the three men. Some started, that is, but many of them lay in little heaps where they had fallen from an unexpected blast of rifle fire.

Deal flung a reproving look at Magurth as if accusing him of giving those Japs wrong ideas.

"Down in front!" came a bawling command from the hill behind them. "Hit the dirt, you lonesome tourists, or catch 'em in your teeth."

There was no mistaking that loud-speaker-in-a-barrel roar from Sergeant Keegan. Automatically, as if going through combat training under live ammunition fire, Deal and Magurth dove for the ground, dragging the Seabee bulldozer driver with them.

A blast of small-arms fire swept over them —a steady crackling from the semi-automatic

Garand rifles being fired by the Bull Bats, who wasted no ammunition merely for the sake of making loud noises, and the slurred, interrupted bursts from the Browning automatic riflemen.

A shower of twigs and small limbs clipped from the sparse brush of the hillside pattered down upon the steel battle helmets of the three. Magurth, with one hand still gripping the nape of the Seabee's neck, "to keep an amachure from getting his head blowed off," he explained, watched the last of the enemy, caught out there on the air strip, mowed down by the murderous fire.

Suddenly, a harsh silence fell. A small stone came rattling down the slope and when it struck the curved blade of the bulldozer, the three men still flattened beside it instinctively jammed their chins deeper into the dirt.

"On your feet and give your bellies a rest," snapped Sergeant Keegan standing over them with a smoking hot .45 Colt still in his fist. He paused to take another swift look about before setting the safety catch on his weapon and jamming it into its holster. Meanwhile, Magurth and Deal slowly got to their feet.

After one look at a huddle of prone figures still clutching bayoneted rifles where they had fallen not twenty yards from where he was standing, Magurth let home the bolt of his empty Garand with a rattling clank and said, "You was damn near thirty seconds too late, Sergeant."

Private Deal, solicitously brushing the dust from his star-gauged Springfield sniper's rifle, looked up to say, "Somebody slip me a couple of clips. I'm fresh out of hulls." He caught two clips of Garand ammunition tossed to him and proceeded to strip the cartridges from them and reinsert them in some empty Springfield clips he carried in his shirt pocket.

Just then Corporal Finkle, with a Browning slung over his shoulder and followed by his squad, came single file along the foot path at the base of the hill. He jerked his thumb backward over his shoulder and said laconically, "It worked O. K. Sergeant. First blast we give 'em turned 'em right back where you guys could really pour it to 'em. . . Hey, Magurth, there's dirt on your nose. Wipe it."

"No cracks about that dirt on my nose," retorted Magurth. "It tasted better'n any salami you ever sliced in that delicatessen back in the Bronx."

THE SMALL talk ended then and there, for Sergeant Keegan stood looking over Deal and Magurth with his huge fists resting on his raw-boned hips while rivulets of sweat cut clean channels down his dust-caked neck.

"A fine pair of oil-cans you two turned out to be, going over the bow, schooner rigged, for a joyride in a Seabee bulldozer without sending word back where the picnic was going to be. How the hell can I run a war right when my advance patrol don't keep in touch?"

A little apologetically, Private Deal said, "We knew you'd figure out which way we went when we left the trail back there."

"Yeah," chimed in Magurth, "it was a case of making a nice, easy road for you guys to follow us, or miss the chance of getting you here in time to smack down these yellow-bellies we been chasing for three days."

"O. K., where's the beer you two and this Seabee here snuck off to guzzle?" demanded Sergeant Keegan, uncompromisingly. "I know blasted well you ain't had time to drink it all."

"Beer's all on the other side of this here air strip, in the half-track following the skipper's command car, Mac," drawled the bulldozer driver. "Hop aboard and I'll run you over there for a snort."

"From right here, I see where the beer is." Sergeant Keegan strode over to the bulldozer and jerked back the tarpaulin covering a large lump beside the driver's seat.

For a moment the sergeant stared in silent disbelief at the Jap machine gun and its accompanying box of ammunition. A skin-peeling glance flicked over the Seabee, to Magurth, to Private Deal. . . "O. K., it ain't beer. Now which one of you Professor Einsteins is going to explain why you let them Japs come within an ace of smoking you down for keeps without turning this thing loose on 'em?"

Private Deal avoided the accusing eye of his sergeant and said nothing.

By way of illustrating his forthcoming remarks, the Seabee slid three large fingers into a vacant slot in the Jap machine gun and said, "Any time, Mac, you work out the trick of killing a Jap machine gunner too quick for him to jerk his breech block and heave it into the weeds, put me down for two tickets in the front row."

Magurth lifted a heavy wrist and inspected his broken strapwatch. "The goon who told me this was shockproof lied forty fish worth. Who's got the time?"

"That reminds me," said Sergeant Keegan, lifting his own left wrist and tapping what was once his most cherished possession, second only to his .45 Colt, but was now a hopelessly battered piece of junk. "I ruint this, hurrying to save your worthless hides—eighty-six smackers' worth."

Magurth turned to Private Deal. "Say, kid, d'ya remember that Jap captain or major you knocked for a ghoul with your first shot?"

Deal, nursing his star-gauged Springfield, nodded with commendable modesty.

"O. K., we shove off and frisk him," announced Magurth. "Bet he was carrying a watch twicet as good as anybody in this outfit ever owned."

Meanwhile, across the air strip an entire Seabee battalion was debauching into the open. Jeeps, half tracks, bulldozers, tractors drawing enormous Maney scrapers were taking position in a sweeping semi-circle about a command car, as if about to receive their working assignments from an officer standing on the seat of the command car.

"On your way, you two," snapped Sergeant Keegan. "And if you don't glom me a better watch than I busted, keep right on picking 'em up and laying 'em down till you're a thousand miles from here." He turned to the Seabee bulldozer driver and pointed across the field. "I'm giving you just thirty seconds to get off United States Marine Corps property. And don't go running over no Japs with good watches on 'em, neither. Shove off, swabbie."

Unhurriedly, the bulldozer driver fished a small notebook and a stub pencil from his pocket. He scribbled a short note on a blank page and thrust notebook and pencil into Keegan's hand. "Sign right under where it says me and Herman the Vermin was on this air strip, ready for duty, at 1315, Mac. I'm needing it to prove to the skipper I wasn't late."

Strictly in his official capacity and still maintaining his uncompromising demeanor toward all and sundry trespassers upon his field of military authority, the first sergeant of the Bull Bats appended his signature to the statement and returned the notebook—coolly retaining the stub pencil, however.

"Thanks, Mac," said the bulldozer driver, then mounted his machine and went clanking off across the air strip to join his battalion.

To a man, the Bull Bats watched the huge machine approach the first mortar shell crater made by Magurth. They saw the big steel scraper blade expertly lowered to working position. Then the bulldozer passed on, leaving all in good order in its wake.

Sergeant Keegan drew a message pad from his soggy shirt and wrote upon it with his newly acquired pencil: *Enemy detachment engaged and annihilated. In full possession of air strip objective. First Sergt. Keegan, U.S.M.C.*

Then Sergeant Keegan walked with measured pace out onto the air strip—to inspect the watch the returning Privates Deal and Magurth were bringing. Correction: The best of the half dozen watches they were carrying.

"Were it not for the food parcels we received through the Red Cross I feel sure that many prisoners would have been unable to carry on. The clothing which came through was also sorely needed and put to good use immediately. The Red Cross receives my wholehearted endorsement and thanks for making life possible during those dark months."

—AN AMERICAN PRISONER OF WAR WHO ESCAPED

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UP WHERE THE ANGELS SING

By JOE ARCHIBALD

There was death in the steel cocoon, and death outside. The Luftwaffe was putting on its greatest show in months.

ILLUSTRATED BY EDD ASHE

THE first big bomber to come out of the dusk in the direction of Berlin dropped no red flare and the S-2 officer ringed the name of the pilot, Lieutenant Grant Meserve, on his chart and hoped for more good luck. "A big hole near the top turret," he said to a short, bulky man standing close to him.

A war correspondent, helping to sweat the big Forts in, banged dottle out of his pipe and thought of one of the crew of The Pittsburgh Stogie and of what the little gunner had said before he climbed aboard hours ago. "Little Big" Eddie Cantrell, custodian of the big Fort's port waist gun had said to the chaplain, "Some

of us will never be back, padre, and there's nothing you can do about it. Funny, you will be standing back here all the time, so how will you help some of us get to that place you talk about so much if we happen to get one with our name on it? It is like the Green Pastures maybe, with a pond and some boats?"

Little Big had his doubts, and his early training along certain lines had been neglected. He believed in very little else save what he could actually see and he liked to get an audience and then throw questions at the padre, challenging him to answer them convincingly. Being too much of a materialist, Little Big had been unable to interpret correctly the answers and had openly dismissed them, yet when he went up in the Fort he was always a little fearful as to the consequences in the event that he should stop one for keeps.

The Pittsburgh Stogie stopped rolling and the crew tumbled out. The painting of Adolph's face with the stogie blowing up under his exaggerated nose was well riddled and the man wearing the green band guessed that the Nazi fighter pilots had taken real offense at the trademark. Little Big came lumbering away from the Fort with the other waist gunner, Pete Sanger. Like Eddie Cantrell, Sanger looked for little help above the ground when the going was hot—unless it came from Mustangs and Thunderbolts and Spitfires. Yet the philosophies of the pair of gunners were as different as the potency of a rocket shell and a bazooka. Little Big was fearful of stepping off because he was convinced there was little beyond but his allotted six feet of earth. Pete Sanger dreaded the thought of death because he loved life so very much.

"A pair for the book," the S-2 officer grinned to himself.

The night kept filling with the sounds of returning bombers and just as the crew of The Pittsburgh Stogie reached the door of the briefing room, a Fort mushed down and dropped a red flare that bathed the area of confusion with a bloody brilliance.

Several screaming ambulance engines raced and crash trucks were on their way when the bomber suddenly caught fire and went into a spin. It crashed in a meadow nearly a mile away and the smoke and flame mushroomed up and made the war correspondent wish he had not eaten that supper.

Another Fort greased the runway, Number Four engine throwing a thin stream of smoke, a big hole gouged out of the right wing.

"Plenty of work to do tonight, Pete," Little Big said wearily. "An' not just for the groundmen." He walked into the briefing room, poignantly aware that the horror of the recent action was still galloping along his nerves. "Wonder what his ideas are about cremation, Pete?" Out there the world seemed to throb with the thump and whine of healthy and sick engines.

TWO hours later they knew that six of the bombers were not coming back. That one out there in the meadow was a twisted, smoldering ruin. It had been flown by a pilot named Amsdell, who had been a devout man and had sung in the choir of the little village church on the Sundays he had been free. Ten men had gone along with him, and they had been good men.

Well, it was that way with every mission. They couldn't all come back and the brass hats expected anywhere from four to eight percent losses. Little Big drank his coffee and the hot stuff calmed his nerves a little but it did not stop him from thinking. His mind was filled with things he could not understand. He heard only abstractedly the reports of the rest of the crew. When he spoke to the Intelligence officer, he simply said, "I think I got me two of the bustards—I'm sure of one." Hell, you couldn't remember all that had happened. When the sky was choked with Luftwaffe you just kept firing. No time to write a book. "The rocket shells? They are hit or miss, sir, but I caught a chunk of one in my flak apron."

The crews of the Forts finally scattered. Little Big and Pete Sanger walked slowly across the great perimeter toward a row of tiny stucco buildings erected by the RAF for the visiting Yanks. Close to a dispersal area, Sanger pulled Little Big to a sudden stop. "The padre, Eddie."

Captain Halsey Sherdel, chaplain attached to the Eighth Air Force, was a tall lean man with deeply set eyes, the complete antithesis of the men of the cloth as depicted by Hollywood. He seemed to have lost a little of his height and his steps were heavy. Little Big said, "Evenin', padre. You had a tough night of it, sir."

The chaplain nodded. "Captain Amsdell was one of the finest men I ever knew, Sergeant."

"I don't get it," Little Big said. "Why didn't He take me or Pete or a dozen others I could mention? It don't add up, padre. It's all mixed up in my head."

Sanger growled, "Everythin' in your skull is mixed up, Eddie! Shut your big mouth, which is not just little big. All right, I can't see the light myself, but after the war I think I'll look harder."

Captain Sherdel smiled. "There is hope for you, Pete," and went on his way.

Sergeant Sanger was a great morale-builder as a rule and he sincerely believed in the old bromide that the end justifies the means. A certain Captain Wes Bentley in the Air Force could furnish a testimonial regarding the sergeant's means, if anyone took the trouble to fly to India, where he was now stationed, and ask him for it. When the captain had been flying Marauders from this same village, the daughter of the local vicar had wished very much that he would do more than smile at her. She was exceedingly beautiful, and all the men

who manned or serviced the Forts within a radius of forty miles of the village considered her to be the nearest thing to an angel they had ever seen. Her name was Angela.

The vicar's daughter had become very ill and it had seemed that she would die. With the crisis near, Sergeant Sanger, close to tears, had managed to convince the vicar and the medicos that she lacked a certain incentive to carry on, and he, Sanger, thought he could furnish it if they gave him a chance. He had gone into the sick room and sat down near Angela's bed. "You got to live for us, Miss Trysdale," he had said. "Especially for Captain Wes Bentley. He's head over heels in love with you but never had the nerve to tell you. He's up north somewhere right now an' couldn't get here. . . ."

Angela had made a miraculous recovery. The trouble was, however, that Captain Bentley was already betrothed to a girl back in Kentucky whom he loved very much. The story spread, as stories will, and it appeared in a newspaper in Kentucky, where the defenders of Southern Womanhood, aroused, demanded satisfaction from Captain Bentley. The straightening-out process required weeks and had its effect on Sergeant Sanger's jaw. Angela, however, proved to be a very good sport and refused to go into a relapse. She even rewarded Pete Sanger with a kiss and her father invited him to tea.

Once airborne, strangely enough, Pete Sanger was anything but a morale-builder. In the air he never smiled and he fought the krauts with a set poker face, for he believed a smile had a tendency to produce softness in a man. When the ME's and Focke-Wulf's moved in, you had to have all the beast in you.

On the Sabbath following Amsdell's tragic end, Little Big went to the village church with Sanger and stood and sang hymns with the men. If everybody on earth were like Angela, the gunner thought, he could easily be convinced, and it seemed only appropriate that the big shard of sunlight coming down from a stained-glass window should strike directly against her. When the service was over, Angela smiled at Pete Sanger and offered him her hand. "I said a prayer especially for you, Sergeant, the most glorious liar in the American Air Force." She laughed and Little Big warmed to the music of it. Walking away with Sanger he looked back quickly. Johnny Zeh, the tail-gunner of The Pittsburgh Stogie, was talking with the vicar. Johnny had only completed a few missions with the Fort, but he was already showing signs of battle wear and tear.

"He's been sayin' his number was up the last two trips, Pete. You can tell by the way he looks," Little Big said. "I know the signs."

"Nyah!" Sanger said.

"Yeah?" Lots of guys have a mental hazard to lick, Pete. One more trip might either set him right or fix him for good. Like them prize-fighters, a guy has to have so many fights under his belt before he can get used to the lumps. Maybe he's worried about that dame he married up in Northumberland. He asked me why was it fixed so nobody could get away for long until they'd completed so many missions."

Pete Sanger looked at Little Big with more interest and said, "A tail gunner has got to be right, Eddie. He can pull the curtain down on a Fort for keeps if he takes time out durin' a rhubarb to gripe over domestic problems. Didn't I hear Johnny became a father only a couple days ago?"

THE crews of the Forts were briefed again early the next morning and they got the blackboard lecture to acquaint them with the target for the day, altitude above sea-level, time of arrival over the area to be bombed, and the type of bombs to be used in the raid. Demolition to go first, incendiaries to follow up. The same old pattern of violence. Johnny Zeh was wedged between Little Big and Pete Sanger, and the tail-gunner was grinning and seemed impatient to get going.

"Pete," Little Big said when the briefing was over, "what did they put in Johnny's coffee, adrenalin or Vitamin BX2?"

"Johnny's just got morale, is all," Pete said. "Morale, like the ads say, is a lot of little things. I talked to him and asked him how did he and the generals get so chummy he could go off for three or four days after this mission comin' up."

The Pittsburgh Stogie reached Berlin again and tasted the hell of flak and the great swarm of Nazi fighting planes. It unloaded and turned and roared back toward the Ditch, flayed by cannon and rocket shells and fifty-caliber steel jets. It had gone through hours of concussion and blood and fire and death that would be summed up by the chroniclers of war in a nutshell of magnificent understatement:

> LONDON, June 7 (Sunday). Continuing the air invasion of Europe, very strong forces of B-17 Flying Fortresses and B-24 Liberators of the Eighth Air Force today attacked synthetic oil plants at Merseburg and Litzkendorf. Attacks were also made on Berlin and Dusseldorf.

The Nazi-Focke-Wulf's and ME's buzzed off when the escorting Allied fighters roared over the Lowlands. "Pieces of cake!" Johnny Zeh yelled into the intercom. "You ever see anythin' so sweet?"

Little Big was shaken. Fragmentation from a cannon shell had chugged through the fleshy part of his forearm and he had seen the engineer take it. Pete Sanger, his face as expressionless as the bottom of a pail, swung Little

Big around and examined the wound. He dressed it as best as he could. "This time we caught plenty, Eddie. The nearest we ever come to . . . ."

The Pittsburgh Stogie made a bumpy landing and seemed to crawl like a wounded predatory beast to its dispersal area. The flight surgeon climbed aboard with his little black bag, and Little Big stood around a while and watched them unload the dead and the wounded. The padre got into one of the meat wagons and Little Big guessed the navigator was right on the edge of the big slide. Later, in the briefing room, Johnny Zeh described the action from where he had been sitting. Johnny was primed. "I got me three of the Nazis," he grinned. "By the time my kid takes his first step, I'll make him a present of an even dozen."

Pete Sanger, his feet on solid ground once more, gave out with his infectious grin. "Like I said, Johnny, once you git warmed up to it, you got nothin' to worry about."

Johnny Zeh nodded.

Pete Sanger immediately forgot the tail-gunner. He was watching Little Big Cantrell's hands while the gunner talked to the Intelligence officers. Eddie was not relishing the retake of the horror film over Berlin, and Pete did not like the look on the C.O.'s face.

Toward noon of the next day, Little Big and Pete went into the pub in the little village and drank to the navigator with warm beer. Sinbad, as they called him, was going to pull through all right. When they walked out of the inn, they saw Johnny Zeh hop off a bicycle and fling it against a hedge. The tail-gunner looked pretty thick when he pointed a finger at Sanger.

"Oh-oh," Pete said, and braced himself. This time he was not going to be caught with his guard down as he had been the day that Captain Bentley waded in.

"Wise guy!" Johnny growled. "There was no time off on the books for me an' you knew it, Gunner! The brass hats chased me when I hinted there was. I got a good mind to sock you, Sanger!"

"All right, Johnny. I give you the morale that most likely saw you through your worst mission, and also give you the idea you are the hottest tail-gunner in England, which you are. You fathead, you still got to keep coming back for the sake of her and the kid, haven't you? You was chuckin' it, lettin' them down. You owe it to them to live through this war. If you git yourself killed, I will kick you, Johnny!"

"Huh," Johnny Zeh said, then started to grin. He poked Sanger in the ribs, but easy. "What a character, Eddie, huh?" he asked Little Big.

Little Big shook his head. "When can anybody believe you, Pete—even me?"

Pete pulled Eddie Cantrell along the street. He said, "You got to have faith in me, Eddie. We are pals."

THAT night in the little stucco hut, Sergeant Eddie Cantrell was still fighting nerves, still living over one horrible moment when the bomber had been flung over on its back. He knew that if that burst of flak had not turned the plane over just when it did, he would not be talking to Pete now. That Focke-Wulf had been coming straight into him and his gun had jammed.

He tried to light a cigarette but his fingers could not hold the match steady. Sanger said, "Here's a light, Eddie. Snap out of it!"

"I'll be O.K.," Little Big said. "I will, Pete. But if I only knew there was something coming after, if a guy . . . ."

"You got to forget it, Eddie."

"I talked to the padre this morning, Pete. He told me he talked to a pilot once who nearly died when his oxygen was cut off. The guy said he heard music, Pete, the kind you couldn't hear anywhere on earth. He swore he did. He saw something up there he thought was just a cloud and then—"

"He was out of his head, Eddie. I've seen things comin' out of gas in a dentist's chair. Or do you want to believe it, Little Big?"

Little Big said quickly, "Let's play some gin."

Pete Sanger obliged. He kept watching Eddie Cantrell's eyes, the way he fumbled his cards. He knew the gunner's fear was deeper than his nerves, and at that moment he realized how much Little Big meant to him. He hoped that if one of them was due to go it would be Pete Sanger, because he would never be able to stand by and watch them put Eddie under the ground.

Sanger said after a while, "You'd better quit, Little Big. I have everything but your shirt."

The gunner got up and walked out into the night, and Sanger raked in the cards. One of the pasteboards skipped off the table and slid along the floor. Sanger retrieved it and was about to put it back in the deck when he discovered that it was the ace of spades. He sat down on his cot and stared at the floor for a long time, and finally the shadow of a smile began to play at the corners of his mouth. He peeled and got into bed and slept as soundly as any man in the war.

It began early the next day. All leaves were canceled and the village was out of bounds. There was a significant grimness written on the faces of the higher brackets—a promise that the momentous day had come. The bomber crews and the small army of men that serviced the big Forts did not have to be told. D-Day was dawning.

Rumors flew thick and fast. . . . The invasion fleet was ready to cross the channel. . . . The

Forts and the Mitchells and the Marauders, the Spitfires and Thunderbolts and Mustangs—every available fighter and bomber—would have to keep the skies clear overhead. . . The Luftwaffe would have to come out of hiding at last. . . The showdown was at hand.

For months they had anticipated this hammer blow at Hitler's France. There was briefing—more briefing—and the waiting. And then early one morning at 0600, the crew of The Pittsburgh Stogie learned the job they had to do: precision bombing on the Normandy coast to take care of troublesome spots inland. Already the invasion fleet had struck the beaches.

On the way to the dispersal area, Pete Sanger nudged Eddie Cantrell. "How is it, Eddie?"

"O.K. I'm O.K.," Little Big said irritably. He was not too sure of it. As a little kid he'd never gone in much for make-believe.

From out over the channel came the *errump* of many guns, and the skies eastward were strangely lighted. Johnny Zeh said, "My old man said I should see Paris. How far is it from Cherbourg, Pete?"

"A quarter of a million krauts," Sanger said, and he could feel a terrible constriction in his throat. He was thinking of the men wallowing in the water horrors off the Normandy coast: the steel hedgehogs and pyramids of concrete, huge wooden stakes and tetrahedral traps. Everything had to come across the beach and become targets for Heinie gunners upon the cliffs.

The Forts were leaving. In The Pittsburgh Stogie, Meserve was checking with the co-pilot and his voice was very pleasant in Sanger's ears. Going 'way up high, it was nice to have a guy like Meserve up there at the controls. The padre was also a swell guy but had studied things differently from the Fort pilot. He had learned about more gentler things up there above the clouds than Messerschmitts and Focke-Wulf's.

Meserve got his clearance and was away, the Fort's tires grinding against the gravel. Once airborne, Little Big looked out over the English countryside, which was very much like his native Vermont, and nostalgia had its way with him.

Pete Sanger was pretty sure of Little Big's thoughts. The Fort was on borrowed time. A pitcher, especially if it has been cracked, can be carried to the well once too often. This would be no milk run; this would be the toughest mission of them all. Invasion, with the Luftwaffe out in force for the first time in months—Fats Goering had to take the wraps off it now.

A voice came trickling into the ears of the Fort's crew. "Gabriel Horn speaking, compliments of Kruml's Hair Tonic. Berlin, Paris and Cherbourg radios off the air, ladies and gentlemen. Yes, they're off the air again—stand by—"

The brief banter was good. It was morale. It was a nervous gunner getting the lump out of his throat. The Forts climbed and Little Big could see squadrons of fighters sweeping high above them. Everywhere in the sky there was organ music, the roar of millions of horses. The smoke boiled out of France, and down on the gray waters of the channel, units of the invasion fleet were still crawling toward the beaches. Some were stricken and wallowing in the troughs, but their guns were still firing. The Normandy shore was flaming. Fire and smoke belched up from the cliffs. Invasion barges were aground and hundreds upon hundreds of men choked the beach.

LITTLE Big heard the confused babble in the intercom. He caught shreds of talk between a man down there on a battlewagon and the radio-gunner. He heard Meserve acknowledge Joe Parkman's quick messages abstractedly, for the Luftwaffe was swarming in and over the Forts—Messups and Focke-Wulf's that had got down through the escorting British and Yank Fighters. The maze of it all numbed Little Big's brain. A Messup drove in toward his position and he heated up the fifty and bared his teeth when he saw bits of debris fly off the Nazi plane. Fortresses pitched and tossed around The Pittsburgh Stogie as if they had been made of balsa wood and strips of cellophane. One blew up over the Normandy cliffs and another dived earthward with a wing shot away.

The bomber was taking its run. Meserve had his orders to go in on a "target of opportunity," one of those enemy surprises, strong points that were not known about during the long period of preparation. There could be little evasive action. The Pittsburgh Stogie was going in lower than it should and Little Big, keeping his waist gun howling, heard Meserve checking with the man in the nose. They had to hurry. The muck thrown up by the Nazi ground gunners back of the cliffs was thickening by the second and there did not seem to be a clear path in the sky.

The bomber bucketed as heavy bullets whiplashed the length of it. Flak tore a great chunk out of the left wing just as the bomber whooshed up and knifed through the fragments of the target it had smashed. A shell burst underneath and threw the Fort over on its back and spilled Little Big. He crashed into Pete Sanger and the intercom crackled and became silent for several breathless moments.

Little Big, on his feet again, tasting blood in his mouth, tried to think clearly. Hell, a guy had to keep thinking or he would not live long. Meserve was yelling for the belly-turret man to come in. He barked the navigator's name. A voice said, "No use, Skipper. I'll take over." So there was death in the steel cocoon.

He nearly gave way until he heard Sanger cussing out a Focke-Wulf. He braced himself and swung the gun just as a Nazi yellow-nose nearly crashed into his position. The ME swept up and over and its tail smashed against the Fort's dorsal and Sanger roared, "There goes the bustard and he's falling apart, Eddie!"

Little Big saw another Fort go out. The Luftwaffe was putting on its greatest show for many months. Parachutes blossomed in the sky and Eddie saw one catch in the tail assembly of a Fort, the figure at the end of the shrouds flopping around like a rag doll. How long could a man live in such a hell? All around him, he thought, men were dying. In the Fort, three stations were cold. Then he heard Meserve yelling at Sanger, "Get that bastard, Pete! Coming in!"

Pete was not answering and Eddie Cantrell whirled just as the fury of a Messerschmitt lashed Sanger's position and wrecked the gun. Pete was reeling like a drunken man and trying to catch at any kind of support.

Pete Sanger knew he was going. He caught at a steadying rail and looked at the hell outside. Then he turned his face toward Little Big and gave him a smile beyond Eddie Cantrell's understanding. "It's O.K., Eddie," he forced out, his eyes not very clear. "I tell you everything is O.K.—so you don't have to worry no more!" Then he fell against Little Big and almost dragged the gunner down with him.

Little Big, knowing that there was still a job to do, squirmed clear and hopped to his fifty-caliber and began to pour the heavy stuff into the Nazi hornets that kept swirling in. He kept firing until the navigator got hold of him and pulled him away from the gun. "You're firin' at Thunderbolts and P-38's!"

Little Big drew a sleeve across his eyes and shoved the navigator aside. He got down beside Pete and kept trying to make him speak. But he soon saw there was no use and just stared at Pete's face, relaxed now in perfect peace. Little Big thought about the last expression that face had worn. He had never seen Pete smile like that before, upstairs or down. Not even when he had looked at the vicar's daughter of a Sunday morning. Pete's eyes had been filled with a wonder that to a man like Little Big, who had looked for a certain answer for a long time, could have but one meaning.

Johnny Zeh, blood spattering his face, came out of the tail and looked down at Pete Sanger. "Eddie," he said, "look at him. If it's that nice to die, I guess—"

"Yeah," Little Big laughed jerkily, his eyes watery. "He saw somethin' before he went, Johnny. Heard somethin', maybe, like beautiful music. You should have seen how he smiled! He never smiled up here when the chips were down. Nobody ever saw him smile. So why—"

"I don't know, Eddie. I don't know," Johnny pondered.

"I do," Little Big said, and got up and braced himself. The Skipper was talking to what was left of his crew, telling them the hydraulic gear was smashed and that two engines were feathered and maybe they would have to slide in—a little short of the field.

Little Big felt no qualms. He knew everything would be O.K. no matter how it turned out. Nobody had loved life more than Pete Sanger and yet he had left the world with an expression on his face that only the padre would understand—the padre and Little Big, himself.

ILLUSTRATED BY V. E. PYLES

And so the inevitable happened. With the first darkness a knife flew from a shadow and imbedded itself under his ear. Moung Daw didn't even let out a yelp.

BLOOD from the BLUE

A Fact Story

By GORDON MacCREAGH

ONCE upon a time—this fantastic thing has to begin like a fairy tale—I missed finding, by only sixty-two feet, the largest single precious stone that the world has ever known!

An incredibly splendid blaze of blue light as big as a fist, it was never assayed, never weighed. Its value could only be guessed at by the experts. Like a brilliant meteor it flashed into the world, lasted less than forty-eight hours—and then it was gone! Lost in the dark! Men were killed for a hint or a trace of it. Others are still looking for it!

Perhaps I am lucky those sixty-two feet separated me from the deadly thing. If I had found it I, too, might have been stupid about it—and would have died, even as Moung Daw.

IT WAS in the famous ruby mines of Mogok in Upper Burma and, of course, quite a while before the war. Mogok is up in the jungly Shan hills some sixty miles to the east of the Irrawady River. Access to it was by

flat-bottomed river steamer from Mandalay. The steamer pulled up a shelving sand bank and put out a long teetering plank to the shore. This "port" was called Thabeitkyin; its only function to serve as terminus of the steep mountain road that went to Mogok. In Thabeitkyin's bamboo huts lived some Burmans, some fierce Shan hillmen, and a few transient river-rat white men; among them some of the toughest individuals of all three peoples.

From Mogok come some ninety per cent of the world's best "pigeon blood" rubies. In the same crystalline limestone and granitic gravel are found spinels, garnets and a few sapphires. As the quality and color of the Mogok rubies are recognized as the world's best and more valuable, carat for carat, than diamonds; so also the sapphires of Mogok are the best of their kind.

Now the Japanese hold Mogok and they are furiously working the field under forced draft with enslaved native labor, taking out of it every last possible gem stone to help pay for their war. It is estimated that, during the two years they have had it, they have taken out a ten-year's normal output.

From which circumstance—and this may be a useful tip to those who set store by jewels—men who know the jewel market have no hesitation in prophesying that, after the war, the price of rubies will flop as the Japanese loot is released for quick sale. And for the same reason—South Africa having a war to pay for, too, and the Diamond Syndicate having something like half a ton of hoarded gems in its vaults—the price of diamonds, too, will come down; though not so cataclysmically as that of rubies, because the organization that doles out diamonds with a careful eye upon artificial market prices is world wide.

The Mogok rubiferous area embraces a long valley hedged between high, jungle-grown hills along the edges of which a collection of native villages has grown, housing workers, dealers, gamblers, all the hangers-on of any mining camp. The British-Burma Government leases—leased—the whole tract to an English company, the Burma Ruby Mines Syndicate. The Syndicate, taking its pattern from the old Kimberly diamond practice, employed both open-pit and shaft-mining processes, using modern machinery. To describe it very briefly: The gravel was dug by native hand labor—the laborers wearing weird canary cages over their heads; for anybody could spot a likely gem stone if his shovel happened to turn it on top; and then a workman would promptly swallow whatever looked good for later private redemption. A sardonic joke is that several tons of not so good gravel must have been swallowed by inexperienced workmen before the canary cage idea was instituted. In the African diamond fields the protection against pilfering is more drastic. Native labor must sign up for not less than a six-month period, during which service they are kept within practical jail compounds surrounded by electrically charged wire, and the grisly tale, indignantly denied officially, is that they are then given castor oil three days before being released.

In Mogok the raw gravel was run over riffles under a water stream, much as in our own placer gold process, and then white-man help, highly paid to be honest, sorted over the residue on slate tables to pick out and grade the gems.

All very right and proper and safe and sane. But there existed in Mogok another mining system anything but sane and not at all so safe.

The Syndicate, apart from its own immediate diggings, leased out concession claims to anybody who chose to pay the rental. These concessions were regulated only in that they ran from month to month at a price that fluctuated around the three-hundred-rupee figure, depending upon position, and no individual could take up more than one claim at a time, the size of the claim being thirty-one square feet, based on the old Kimberly law. Aside from these simple restrictions, the lessee might choose his claim wheresoever his hunch or some one of the swarm of soothsayers and fortune tellers might persuade him that stones could be found, and where he could divert a little ditch of mountain stream water sufficient to wash his hand-made riffle.

The valley, accordingly, was criss-crossed by a thousand ditches where diggers—native, half-caste, white—worked open pits with crude, counterbalanced pole hoists and hand power.

In such circumstances, much like our own good old bad days of the Forty-Niners in California, some rather hard citizens from all parts of the world gravitated to Mogok.

An industrious man with a strong back might be sure of covering at least his expenses almost anywhere within the rubiferous area. Beyond that, if the gods were good, he might at any moment turn up a fortune. That the gods were often good, was attested to by the forest of little pagodas and shrines erected by the pious in thanksgiving for fortune. My own regret is that I never found occasion to build a pagoda; though, had my circumstances ever warranted, I surely would have become thankfully pious.

Which brings us, at last, to the fabulous sapphire—the largest jewel ever known.

THE gods distribute their favors without discrimination. It was a Burman half-breed who found it, his claim just the second down the line from my own. Sixty-two paltry feet distant. His name, after his Burmese mother, ought to have been Moung Daw. But he wore dirty white-man pants instead of the silken Burman *loongyi* skirt; so he called himself pathetically, Thakin, (meaning Mister), Stuart Wilson.

Just a hop, skip and a jump from where I, none too productively, labored with a Shan hired hand to do the harder work and preserve my white-man dignity, Moung Wilson Daw, too broke to have any help, dug his own. And many was the time he would hoist his scrawny length out of his pit, sweaty and mad, and swear that he might just as well go back to his trade of carpentering.

Then came the miraculous morning that set all Mogok on its ear. Moung Daw let out a yell. The crowd that instantly gathered in Mogok to such a yell saw him holding in his hand a great chunk of dull blue material bigger than his own lean fist! One face of the thing had been sheared away in some ancient earth convulsion, and you could see, as through a clear window, deep into a wonderful, luminous pool of perfect cornflower blue!

The man went mad! He clutched the thing to his scrawny chest. His knees trembled and he sat down on a pile of his own recently dug gravel. His eyes looked furtively at the gawping crowd. And right there you could see the Fear descend upon him, see it grip deep into his soul!

You can imagine how any ragged tramp might feel if he should pick up a valuable ring out of the gutters of the tougher sections of any well-policed American city. You must imagine, then, the feelings of lone half-breed Moung Daw amongst those wolves of the world.

You could see the man sweat as his eyes flashed from one face to the next; you could see them rest with instinctive fearful intuition on the more predatory ones. But the hysteria of sudden joy that was close to madness was greater than the Fear—or perhaps the man had some vague impulse that wide publicity would be some measure of protection. He climbed dizzily from his pit—I remember the eager hands, like claws, reaching down to help him. And then he headed for the native bazaar of bamboo sheds and thatched huts. The nearer he came, the more his hysteria mounted. He held his find in his tight-clutched talons above his head and shouted his discovery for all the world to hear.

In his excitement he forgot his pitiful aping of white-man habits and reverted to hoarse thanks in Burmese to the Lord Buddha for his munificence, to the native jungle spirits who brought good luck. He promised fervently to become a *hpayatagá*, an endower of a magnificent pagoda.

The mobs came and gawked. In their crowding numbers was security—for a while. Hungry men looked, glared, muttered. Presently a determined gang would make itself up by sheer attraction of wolf to wolf. Dealers, most of them astute Chinese, who would bid on thousands of dollars' worth of stones in the auction sheds with a nod of the head, peered at the thing and threw up their hands. Hard-looking men shoved through the crowd, jostled Moung Daw. Singly, they hardly dared attempt a grab amongst so many people; but they looked about the crowd for more of their ilk.

Moung Daw, sweating more than ever at his work, would never let his incredible stone out of his hand. He clung to it as to his own heart. The news spread by the same crowd telepathy that let our own Forty-Niners know that so-and-so had struck it rich.

The Syndicate officials, who had sent a pair of policemen to rescue Moung Daw from the mob, looked at the fantastic stone and gasped. They told the man that they themselves just did not have enough money to make him any sort of offer for it, but if he would leave it with them to lock up in their safe, they would set the long-distance machinery in motion to make up a syndicate in London or Amsterdam to buy the gem. Offhand they would not attempt to appraise its value; but by brief guesswork, just handling it, the experts of the mining company estimated the thing to weigh, uncut as it was, between seventeen and eighteen hundred carats! The biggest gem stone ever known to history!

Note now the unchangeable way of the East. The Asiatic in Thakin Moung Wilson Daw's blood shied away from relinquishing his prize from his own possession. What the Oriental has he must keep under his own eye. So do Indian rajahs hoard their vaults of fabulous jewels. So does every coolie bury his pitiful store of rupees under his fireplace. The East is the great graveyard of wealth. It is found, it is minted—and it disappears!

So with Moung Daw who tried to call himself Stuart Wilson. He clutched his stone and chattered that the company should form its purchasing syndicate first and when they had the money to talk business they should let him know. And he took his deadly stone and went away.

By this time it was coming dusk!

And before nightfall, as soon as the shadows were dark enough to blur faces, two attempts were made upon Moung Daw's life! They failed only because they were hurried, before somebody else should make his try for incalculable wealth.

And then fear piled upon fear had the effect of jolting the man's nerves back to sanity. Moung Daw disappeared from where men were.

After a while he came back; and about that time I met him.

I said, "What? Still alive, chump?"

And he said, "Yes, Thakin. By the luck of the Omnipotent." And he didn't mean the Christian God either. He agreed, "Yes, I have been a fool. I was mad with the excitement. *You* know how we can dig and dig for a lifetime and remain forever poor. But now I have seen sense. I no longer have it on my person. I have buried it!"

I told him, "You are still a fool. What if

somebody catches you some night and puts hot charcoal between your toes? How good will your burying be, and for how many minutes?"

And the fool said, "With this wealth to come I can borrow money from a *Chetty* and hire me a strong guard. I must tell it in the bazaars that I do not have the stone."

So I went with him to the bazaars and he shouted his news like a town crier; and hungry men came and stared into his face in their high-held lantern light; and they frisked him as thoroughly as customs men search our smuggler suspects at our docks. And then Moung Daw went into the dingy native eating places to advertise his news afresh; and they frisked him a dozen times over; and baffled men looked at his belly and you could see the fierce thought in their eyes under the smoky kerosene lamps. But they muttered, "It was too big for him to have swallowed." And all Mogok agreed and said, "Yes, the fool has seen sense and has saved his life."

AND now consider the sheer Oriental dilatoriness of it all again. Moung Daw who liked to call himself Wilson was going to hire a guard. Certainly he was going to hire him a strong bodyguard.

I told him, "But when, chump?" and I quoted to him the great truth out of the Bible that my hyper-religious grandfather used to make me study till my natural revolt set in.

"Though thou braize a fool with wheat in a mortar with a pestle, still will his foolishness not depart from him."

He was not Stuart Wilson enough to understand it, so I elucidated. "Fathead, get your guard *now*. Before somebody gets a chance to twist your arm or what all else and make you talk."

And Moung Daw said, "Yes, yes. As soon as possible. But you understand, my friend"—he was now rich, this half-caste, and could call anybody his friend—"you understand that one must exercise care in selecting a guard that will remain honest against the bribes that will be offered."

And perhaps he was right in that last. But with so tempting a fortune within reach of bold men one cannot afford to be dilatory. Things moved too fast.

The fantastic news of the find had flashed its way to the riverfront; and immediately every river rat within hearing—before the later news of the burying came—started out for Mogok. One full hard day's travel by mule for any man who might not want his face to be recognized by some driver of the established car service.

A second dusk came around the clock; and with it some of these newcomers from down-river.

And any man with predatory ideas who was not desirous of being recognized was certainly not going about asking too interested questions such as might bring out the later news of the burying. Such a man would ask as little as necessary.

Men reported later—after it was all over—that certain furtive-looking fellows had asked innocently, "Who is the lucky chap who found the stone?" And the lucky chap was pointed out and the innocent inquirers then quietly drifted away to lie low.

So the inevitable happened.

With the first darkness, when the "lucky chap" was on his way home, a little woozy from all the hospitality of all his new friends, a knife flew from a shadow!

Moung Daw didn't even let out a yelp. Nobody heard a thing. Nobody knew a thing about it. Somebody found him the following morning.

The thrower's knife was imbedded under his ear; his clothing had been ripped from him in a hurried search.

And his fabulous jewel was buried!

A blazing blue meteor, it had flashed into the world, lasted less than forty-eight hours, then blinked out into the darkness!

All of Mogok went mad. All digging stopped. Swarms of men scrabbled through the whole surrounding landscape to hunt for buried treasure. We took Moung Daw's bamboo hut apart. We split the thick canes to toothpicks. We went through the thatch with a comb. Frantic men bailed out his outhouse. We dug up every inch of a hundred yards all around the hut. Men bullied and threatened his close confidants. We dug up every place he had ever been known to go. All the magicians and fortune tellers in the district came and cast their spells and sacrificed goats and burned things that stank with acrid smoke. The whisper was that even the local Christian chapel suddenly sprouted a bonanza crop of candles.

And nobody ever found a trace or a hint of anything!

Somewhere, under some stone, or at the roots of some tree that offered a distinguishing mark for Moung Daw alone, in some utterly innocent and unsuspected spot, the largest gem in the world's history remains buried still!

And I'll bet, if ever an earthbound ghost haunted a spot, the grim shade of Moung Daw mourns over his jungle safe.

Some day, perhaps, the gods will give to some devout person the luck to stumble upon it. And if that person does not go mad he may live to profit by it.

And, who knows, perhaps the Moung Daw Sapphire will come back into history with a curse on it. Like the Hope Diamond and the Baroda Ruby. There is enough blood on some of those fabulous jewels to make a curse a very real thing.

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE WERT

OIL FIELD LIAR

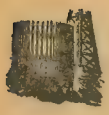
More Tall Tales Gib Morgan Told

Collected by MODY C. BOATRIGHT

IN our December issue we printed several "tall tales" about Gib Morgan, oil fields counterpart of the lumberjacks' Paul Bunyan, and the Pecos Bill of the cowboys. Here are five more fabulous fibs culled from the Morgan legend by Professor Boatright, who is on the faculty of the University of Texas and an editor of the Texas Folklore Society publications. We plan to print additional tales of Gib from time to time.—K. S. W.

I

HOGS IN THE HILLS



WHEN the oil excitement broke out in West Virginia, Gib was employed by the Scarcely Able and Hardly Ever Get Oil Company (capitalized at $5,000,000,000.00, with a paid in capital of $300.00) to go into the region and lease and drill on everything in sight. Gib had a lot of surprises waiting for him down there.

He thought he had seen hills in Clarion and Venango Counties back in Pennsylvania, but by the time he got to Wheeling he realized that he hadn't known what a hill was. At the place where he boarded while drilling the first well, he could look up the chimney and see the cows come home, and the only way he could grease a wagon was to chain it to a stump. He drove the stake for the first location in the edge of a corn patch because that was the only place where he could find a piece of level ground big enough to set up the rig on. From the top of the derrick he could look down the chimney and see the farmer's wife churning.

Gib got the rig up the first day, but as it was about dusk by the time he had everything in place, he decided to wait until the next morning to spud in. As he had driven out that morning he had seen a good many hogs along the trail, eating acorns and rooting in the underbrush. And he had noticed that every hog he got a good look at had a round hole in his right ear. He supposed that this was the owner's mark, and a good mark it was, too, since it would be a hard one to change.

Gib had his tool-dresser hitch up the team, and since he was going to take the short steep way down rather than the long winding way up, he locked the back wheels to brake the buck-

board as he drove down to the farm house. Just as Gib was about to get in to drive off, up came a drove of hogs, thousands of hogs, big hogs, little hogs, and spotted hogs. On the brink of the mountain they stopped short. Every hog sat down and put his right hind leg through the hole in his right ear to rough-lock himself down the side of the mountain. One would have thought that an avalanche or an earthquake had visited the country by the noise they made going down. Hundreds of tons of stone and gravel followed them to the bottom.

As he watched them he discovered that they belonged to many different owners, for about halfway down the mountain, the big stream of hogs began to divide into smaller streams, each flowing to a different farmhouse below.

Gib later talked to the natives about what he had seen, and they told him that their grandfathers had had to cut holes in their hogs' ears, but that after several generations of careful breeding, the hole had become a hereditary trait, and now a pig with a solid ear was considered a rare throw-back.

II

HOW GIB PAID A BOARD BILL

IN THAT same region there was one farmer whose hogs had been attacked by an eye disease, and every brute of them except one old sow had lost its eyesight. He trained this old sow to take care of the rest of the drove. They could root around the bushes and find mast and keep as fat as the neighbors' hogs, but they never could find their way back to water without help. When they got thirsty they would line up, each hog taking in its mouth the tail of the hog in front of it. Then the one at the head of the line would take hold of the tail of the old sow and she would lead them first to the creek for water and then home.

Now before Gib had completed his first well, his money got low and he saw it was going to run out entirely before he got paid off. He asked the farmer he was staying with whether he would be willing to accept hogs in place of cash for his board bill. The farmer said they weren't used to much money up in that neck of the woods anyway, that they generally paid their bills in pumpkins or corn or hogs or whiskey, and if Gib wanted to pay in hogs that would suit him fine.

So the next day about dusk, when the hogs always went to water, Gib was down at the creek with a sharp knife in his pocket. Pretty soon here came the old sow with twenty shoats following her. Gib waited until they had finished drinking and formed the line again. Then he slipped up quietly and took the old sow's tail in his left hand and cut it off with his right. Still holding the tail, he led the whole drove home.

III

HOW GIB SAVED A FARMER'S LIFE

GIB had some bad luck on that first well, which turned out to be the good luck of the farmer. About five hundred feet down he broke a pin and lost his bit. The only thing to do was to rig up a string of fishing tools and go to work. He put a pair of long stroke jars below the drill stem and below the jars a horn socket. The horn socket was a tube with a conical flare at the bottom to fit over the broken bit and a spring latch to hold the bit as it was being drawn from the well.

As Gib was making up the string of tools he noticed the farmer out hoeing corn. At the end

of each row he would stop and lean on his hoe and rest a while before he hoed the next row. Just as Gib was about to lower the tools into the well, he heard a loud crack like a stick breaking and saw a cloud of dust coming from the edge of the field. At first he thought it was a hog going down the hill, but pretty soon he heard yelling and cussing, and a boy hollered out, "Ma, Ma, Pa's done fell out of the corn patch."

Gib knew that something had to be done and done quick. He threw the tools off the ledge and let out cable. When he had run out about fifteen hundred feet, he caught the old man's head with the horn socket and reeled him back up.

That night the old lady said, "Jim, I told you you ought to build a fence around that there corn patch. It's dangerous to work up there."

Jim said, "It warn't a fence I needed. It war a new hoe handle. I knowed that old one war a-gittin' weak."

The old man and the old lady surely were grateful to Gib for saving his life. After that nothing they had was too good for him.

IV

GIB'S GUNS

GIB MORGAN was one of the busiest men in the world. If he hadn't been, he couldn't have done all the things he did—not in one man's lifetime. Yet he did manage to find time for a little recreation now and then, generally fishing or hunting.

His fame as a hunter depended in some part upon two very remarkable and famous guns he owned, both of which he had designed himself and had had manufactured at no inconsiderable cost. One was a fine rifle with a telescope sight, the first ever placed on a gun. He used to hunt wild pigs with it—javelinas they called them in Texas. He could climb a mesa or even a slight hill, and survey the country for thirty miles around. If there was a drove of javelinas anywhere within that radius, he could focus his telescope sight on them and draw them up to where he could hear them grunt. The rest was easy. All he had to do was to pull the trigger. He couldn't miss them. But shooting at such long range, he found that the meat would often spoil before he could get to it. He thought and studied a while and then it occurred to him to salt his bullets. After that he had no trouble.

Equally famous was his fowling piece, a twenty-four barrel shotgun. He designed it for shooting the passenger pigeons that used to fly over Clarion Valley in such numbers that they blotted out the sun. When a flock passed over, even if it was twelve o'clock sun time, the cows came home to be milked and the chickens went to roost.

Gib never would forget the first time he shot this gun. It had just come from the gunsmith's a few days before, and Gib had been waiting for the pigeons. One day they came. He got out his new fowling piece, loaded all twenty-four barrels to the muzzle, and rushed to the woods. By that time it was too dark for him to see more than ten feet in front of him. He raised the gun to his shoulder, pointed it toward the sky and fired all twenty-four barrels. That was the last he knew for some time. When he came to, he thought his folks must have picked him up for dead and buried him alive. He began struggling, however, more from instinct than conviction, and after an hour or so he saw sunlight.

He had been knocked through the top soil and three feet into the hardpan and buried in pigeons seventy-two feet deep.

That surely was a lesson to him. After that he loaded his gun only halfway to the muzzle.

V

GIB'S DOGS

GIB had owned lots of good hunting dogs in his day, three of them very famous. One was a little white fice, the best rabbit dog in the whole State of Pennsylvania. He could worm his way into the underbrush, and if there were a rabbit anywhere in it he could find it and chase it out. And he was fast, too. It wasn't often that a rabbit got away from him.

One day this little fice routed a rabbit and began chasing it down the hill so fast that rabbit and dog looked like one gray streak. The rabbit, seeing that it could not outrun the dog, stopped suddenly and the dog ran over him and crashed headlong into the stump of a sapling which had been broken off in a storm and from which a sharp splinter projected. The splinter split the dog in two from the tip of his nose to the tip of his tail. Gib was terribly put out when he saw his little white fice lying there in two pieces. But he did not take time to grieve. He grabbed up the halves, rubbed them with Kier's Seneca oil, a bottle of which he always carried in his pocket for such emergencies, slapped them together and put them down. The dog ran on after the rabbit and soon caught it. Gib thought there was something queer about the way the dog ran, but he went so fast that he couldn't be sure what it was. As the fice brought the rabbit to Gib, he discovered that he had been a bit hasty in putting him together. He had put two legs up and two legs down. It turned out, however, that he had unwittingly made an improvement on nature. The dog could run faster than ever. He simply spun around like a cartwheel with such momentum that he could overhaul any rabbit in the Allegheny Valley. He was the fastest and most famous rabbit dog in Pennsylvania.

Gib neglected to take out a patent, however, and it wasn't long before his neighbors began splitting their dogs open and putting them back together in imitation of Gib's.

Of course this reversible fice, fast though he was, could not keep pace with Gib's wolf dog, a greyhound. For years he was Gib's constant companion wherever he went.

Gib never would forget the time he took him to St. Louis. When he was about to get on the train—the fastest on the Pennsylvania line—the conductor stopped him. He said he didn't allow dogs in the coaches, but Gib could put him in the baggage car. Gib said he'd just lead him. So he tied him to the rear coach, giving him about twenty feet of leash.

In about an hour the conductor came around and told Gib that the train was going a hundred and fifty miles an hour and that he had better see about his dog. Gib went back but couldn't see the dog anywhere. He climbed down on the steps and looked under the coach. There was his hound running along on three legs.

He hadn't been crippled. One of the wheels had developed a hot box and the dog was trying to cool it.

The Legend of Og

By LON WOODRUM

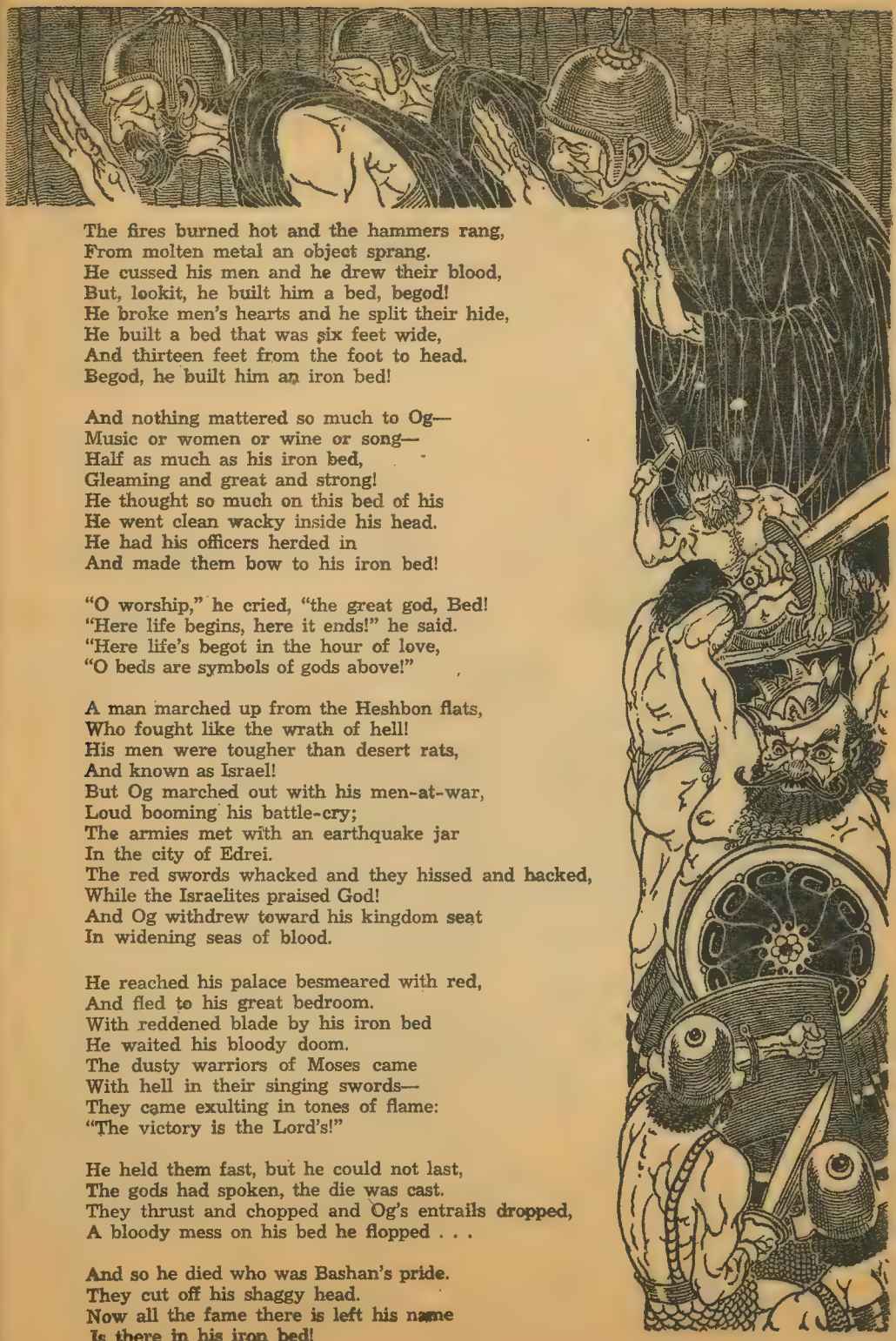
DECORATION BY L. STERNE STEVENS

Back in the ages that men have lost,
Deep-smothered in time's dark fog,
A land called Bashan was built and bossed
By one who was known as Og.
King Og was broad as a Bashan cow
And tall as a Bashan pine.
He gobbled mountains of smoking chow
And guzzled down kegs of wine.
With song and laughter his palace rang . . .
He married a hundred wives;
Through many battles his saber sang,
Snuffing out ten thousand lives.

King Og was reckless and brave and wild,
He loved to laugh like a careless child . . .
But one day he got it into his head,
Begod, he'd build him an iron bed!

From Gilead to the Hermon snows,
In south and the west and north,
In sixty cities the word went forth,
The cry, "He's building a bed!" arose.

He whipped his slaves with a bloody whip
And sent 'em on many a killing trip
To bring him iron from the distant hills.
His workmen all combined their skills—



The fires burned hot and the hammers rang,
From molten metal an object sprang.
He cussed his men and he drew their blood,
But, lookit, he built him a bed, begod!
He broke men's hearts and he split their hide,
He built a bed that was six feet wide,
And thirteen feet from the foot to head.
Begod, he built him an iron bed!

And nothing mattered so much to Og—
Music or women or wine or song—
Half as much as his iron bed,
Gleaming and great and strong!
He thought so much on this bed of his
He went clean wacky inside his head.
He had his officers herded in
And made them bow to his iron bed!

"O worship," he cried, "the great god, Bed!
"Here life begins, here it ends!" he said.
"Here life's begot in the hour of love,
"O beds are symbols of gods above!"

A man marched up from the Heshbon flats,
Who fought like the wrath of hell!
His men were tougher than desert rats,
And known as Israel!
But Og marched out with his men-at-war,
Loud booming his battle-cry;
The armies met with an earthquake jar
In the city of Edrei.
The red swords whacked and they hissed and hacked,
While the Israelites praised God!
And Og withdrew toward his kingdom seat
In widening seas of blood.

He reached his palace besmeared with red,
And fled to his great bedroom.
With reddened blade by his iron bed
He waited his bloody doom.
The dusty warriors of Moses came
With hell in their singing swords—
They came exulting in tones of flame:
"The victory is the Lord's!"

He held them fast, but he could not last,
The gods had spoken, the die was cast.
They thrust and chopped and Og's entrails dropped,
A bloody mess on his bed he flopped . . .

And so he died who was Bashan's pride.
They cut off his shaggy head.
Now all the fame there is left his name
Is there in his iron bed!

ROGER SUDDEN

By THOMAS H. RADDALL

THE STORY THUS FAR:

ROGER SUDDEN, handsome young Jacobite, returns from the Continent to his family seat, Suddenholt, in Kent, on the night of January thirtieth, 1749. He left Oxford to follow Prince Charlie into exile in '45 and is now returning to England to rally Jacobite support for him. He finds the estate in sad repair and leaves Suddenholt, promising himself that he will go to the colonies and bring back enough money to restore the place to its former glory.

On the road to London, penniless and undecided as to his destination, he is held up by TOM FULLER, a sailor turned highwayman. Managing to disarm the would-be holdup man, he decides to help him rob the Gravesend tide-coach to get some money. The sole occupants of the coach turn out to be two foppish British officers, COLONEL BELCHER and MAJOR WOLFE, who had fought Prince Charlie's men at Culloden. Delighted to find his victims are also his political enemies, Roger taunts them as he robs them, letting them know that he is a Jacobite but not revealing his name.

Reaching London, Tom Fuller guides Roger to Tooley Street in the Southwark slums, where they decide to hide out until they can find a boat leaving for one of the colonies. They find accommodations in the house of one ISAAC TROPE.

Roger's and Tom's decision to leave Tooley Street and their choice of destination is occasioned by the announcement of the Lord

Roger shouted to Tom Fuller and showed him a break in the rocks where the rangers and Scottish troops could land safely.

Mayor of London that the government will provide free passage for all discharged servicemen, husbandmen and those who know a trade, to Nova Scotia and give land grants to them.

On the appointed day they sign up along with the impoverished denizens of Tooley Street and thousands like them from all over England. Roger and Tom are assigned to the *Fair Lady*, a snow, or small brig, whose captain is old JOB HUXLEY. On board they meet the only two paying passengers, CAPTAIN JOHN FOY and his wife, MARY FOY. Roger is shocked when Mrs. Foy rebuffs his hitherto irresistible attempts at love-making.

The *Fair Lady* reaches Chebucto harbor in Nova Scotia in June, and one by one, the transports arrive. Gradually a town which comes to be named Halifax begins to grow on the edge of the wilderness.

Roger and the group from Tooley Street go across the bay to a sawmill to work for the ranger, GILMAN. One September day, a roving band of Micmac Indians falls upon the men at the mill site, beheads and scalps several of them. The rangers pursue them, but only manage to kill three before the rest escape in canoes. The rangers, in retaliation, scalp one, who wears a small stone fish on a thong around his neck. They throw the scalped body into the lake and return to the mill site. Roger stays behind, hoping to retrieve the heads of his friends. While looking through the underbrush, he discovers a hidden canoe. Suddenly three Micmacs jump on him from behind, bind and gag him, and take him away, nearly unconscious, in their canoe.

He is taken to a Micmac camp in Shubenacadie, where he is held prisoner and questioned by GAUTIER, an Acadian trader who lives with the Indians. They suspect him of having killed Bosoley (Beau Soleil), the chieftain, but do not kill him because they wish to recover the sacred amulet which Bosoley wore —the little stone fish. Roger is held prisoner for many months, during which time he learns the Micmac tongue from Gautier. Finally, however, SAN BADEES KOAP, a chieftain, orders his death. He is saved by WAPKE, Bosoley's widow, who has taken a liking to him and demands that he be given to her.

For five years he is kept with the tribe in the wilderness, carefully guarded so that he cannot escape. When Wapke's mourning period is over and she wishes to become his wife in fact, Roger puts her off, telling her that he loves another woman—the red-haired wife

ILLUSTRATED BY
HARVE STEIN

of John Foy. Wapke's pride makes her give him up and she arranges for her father to sell him to the French at Louisburg.

At Louisburg, Roger gets a job with M. RODRIGUES, a wealthy merchant who runs a smuggling trade with the English colonies in addition to his thriving business with the French. As bookkeeper, Roger learns a great deal about the business and Rodrigues, who needs another agent in Halifax, offers to set him up as a secret partner there. Roger accepts and Rodrigues arranges for his escape aboard one of the smuggling vessels, the *Fair Lady*.

Roger finds that Halifax has grown, but it is still an impoverished and defenseless settlement compared to Louisburg. He reports to Rodrigues' agents—whom he finds to his amazement are the Foys—and gets an advance from them for a trading expedition into Micmac territory. Tom Fuller and a group of his friends join him and they set out into the wilderness. Roger stops at the lake where Bosoley's body was left and retrieves the little stone fish from the skeleton's neck, after which the company visits the Micmac camp where Roger was held prisoner. It is deserted except for an old woman who tells him that ABBÉ LE LOUTRE, the mad French priest who controls the Micmac tribes by a mixture of superstition and trade—he sells them guns and firewater, which the British refuse to do—has called all the Micmac warriors together at Beauséjour.

In the succeeding months, Roger sets up a string of trading-posts, returns to Halifax with a great wealth of furs, buys and charters several trading vessels, including the *Fair Lady*, for various trading and smuggling ventures. When the British stage a showdown with the Acadians, who refuse to swear loyalty to the King, and ship them away to other parts of the colonies, Roger is ready to exploit his boats for their transportation. Through an arrangement with the Agent-Victualler, he supplies His Majesty's troops and fleet with beef which he rounds up on the deserted and pillaged Acadian farms. When the Foys learn of this, they protest, admitting that they are agents for the French. Roger breaks with them, now being wealthy enough to continue on his own, but continues to send his wealth to Louisburg to be invested in Rodrigues' enterprises.

Meanwhile the British are preparing for an attack on Louisburg, which most people, including Roger, believe will meet with failure. One night Mary Foy comes to Roger's house and tells him that she and Captain Foy are under suspicion as spies and must leave at once. She confesses that she loves Roger and is leaving Foy and Roger, admitting that he loves her, too, agrees to sell out his Halifax business and follow her to Louisburg. He sells his entire holdings to his competitor, MAUGER, who grows suspicious and reports the fact to Governor Lawrence. Roger is arrested under suspicion of collaborating with the Foys, and when he is brought for a hearing before the acting commander of the Army in Halifax, the man turns out to be the same Major Wolfe whom he had robbed back in England on the Gravesend coach. Wolfe, now a brigadier, recognizes Roger, and with old Trope and others as witnesses, proves Roger's identity. He throws Roger in jail, but with the aid of Huxley and some of the rangers, Roger escapes and joins Mary in Louisburg on the eve of the attack.

Rodrigues tells him of a store of emergency supplies to be cached secretly in the forest in case the British should succeed in cutting off the town, and asks Roger to take charge. He refuses and goes instead to the coastal defenses at Coromandière on the edge of Louisburg, where no attack is expected.

The British fleet arrives and opens fire on the city, then sends the troops in, in small boats. Many of these are sunk and the signal to retreat is given by Wolfe, who is commanding the landing forces. Roger, standing on the cliffs, sees Tom Fuller and his rangers and some Scottish troops among them, and just as the retreat is ordered, he shouts to them and shows them a break in the rocks where they can land safely. DE GANNES, a young French officer, sees him and shoots at him, wounding him in the breast, but Roger manages to disarm and overpower him and escape to a camp of the Micmacs who are gathered to help the French. He convinces the Indians that all is lost and they flee into the forest, taking him with them, just as the French turn in panic and retreat from Coromandière, followed by the British who have landed.

Roger finds that one of the Indians who helped him is Wapke, greatly aged and very haggard. When she opens his shirt to bandage his wound, he discovers that De Gannes' shot has shattered the little stone fish which he still wears.

PART V

THE Micmacs' camp was beside a broad stream which they called Soolakade, with a range of wooded hills beyond. It was all remarkably like those days of his first captivity. He lay on a brushwood bed in a wigwam of skins and poles, attended by Wapke and one or two older squaws, peered upon by a succession of savage faces, some known but many strange. His wound was not so deadly as it had first appeared, when he spat blood and his whole chest felt smashed. The amulet had taken the force of the ball. Nevertheless, it was a month before he could breathe without a stab in his left lung. The great bruise healed slowly. Wapke kept it covered with a salve and made him drink an infusion of wild cherry bark, night and morning. For hours on end she

squatted by the door blanket, with foreboding in her eyes. Conversation was difficult. Delicacy forbade any question about the four years past. The tale of her life with Koap was written in her ravaged face.

Once he asked her bluntly, "Where is San Badees?"

"He is hunting."

"Where?"

"In the hills. There is no food by the river. This country has been hunted bare."

"Then why do the people stay?"

She made no answer.

He had no notion how far they had taken him. Pain had brought delirium on the way, and he knew only that the two squaws had carried him for miles, slung on a pole like a haunch of venison. He supposed himself far from Louisburg until one night a shift of the wind brought a sea mist over the low hills and a distant grumble of guns. The fortress was still holding out. That was astonishing in itself. Something had upset Wolfe's plans: he should have been thundering at Quebec by now.

The Micmac camp sprawled along both banks of the river for a considerable distance in both directions, and it was growing. There were parties of newcomers every day. He recognized the dialects of hunting grounds as widely separated as Cape Sable and the Restigouche. This, then, must be the culmination of that long migration begun by Abbé Le Loutre, the gathering of the Micmacs toward Ile Royale where for the first time in their history they would comprise a single force. That was it. A weapon was being forged here by the waters of Soolakade. For what purpose? And for whose hand?

The answer to these questions came with an almost forgotten figure that thrust past the door blanket one July afternoon and dismissed the sullen Wapke with a thumb. It was Gautier. The man was little changed. He wore clout and moccasins and stank of sweat and the rancid bear grease with which he had smeared his skin against the flies.

"Kway!" he grunted, regarding the healing bruise on Roger's chest.

"Kway."

"So you have come back to the Meeg-a-maage, Beau Soleil! Have you seen Koap?"

"No."

"You were with the French at Coromandière, one hears."

"Yes. What goes? Louisburg—"

"Louisburg holds, after six weeks of siege. What goes? Many things. In Louisburg—we slip in and out by night across the anchorage, you comprehend—Monsieur Drucour's mouth is so . . ." He drew his mouth down at the corners comically. "He is too dreamy, that man, for the post he holds—and much too honest. The troops are this way, that way. The Artois lost their courage at Coromandière and the Bourgogne joined their flight *à pas de géant,* which is not good for one's breath or one's self-respect. But D'Anthonay's Germans are still full of war, and the Regiment Cambis is fresh from France and fierce for glory. The Compagnies de la Marine—neither good nor bad. They have the virtue of knowing the country. Madame Drucour encourages the artillerymen by appearing on the ramparts every day to fire one or two cannon with her own hands. The great scandal is the fleet. Des Gouttes—he is well named, that man! 'Dribbles!' He wished to leave the harbor when the siege began, but it was a sight of Brest he wanted, not a tussle with Monsieur Boscawen! Drucour and the council forbade him to go. So he slipped two or three of his faster vessels out with despatches, scuttled four to bar the channel and anchored the rest close under the guns of the town. He has taken the food and powder out of his great hulks and encamped his men in the town. But will he fight beside the garrison? Faith, no! He is at odds with Drucour, with fate, with the world! What an animal!"

"But Louisburg—the town—what goes there?" demanded Roger impatiently.

A shrug. "What do you expect? The English were a long time getting up their cannons. It is difficult to land such heavy matters on an open beach in our Ile Royale weather. And they had not reckoned on the nature of the country—swamps, rocks, thickets, insects—a penance for their sins. They did not know how to make so simple a thing as a corduroy road across a marsh, and labored like slaves in the thousands to fill each morass with rocks and earth! *Dieu!* But now all that is done. They are pouring upon Louisburg a fire of hell."

"But surely the walls—"

"Walls! Walls are nothing against mortars, which drop their missiles from the sky. *Zut!* I have seen bombs of a size like that"—he spread his grubby hands—"fizzing and bursting in the streets. What a *petard!* What a *pétaudière! Monsieur,* do you wish the truth? The day of fortresses is past. The power of artillery has changed the face of warfare. It is frightful! Yet—Louisburg holds, and that is sublime. If you doubt the ultimate victory of France in this new war, *monsieur,* remember always Louisburg!"

"Nevertheless, the town must fall, Gautier. What can save it? The English outnumber Drucour four-to-one, and they control the sea. No help can reach Louisburg from France and I doubt if any comes from Canada. Monsieur Montcalm has his hands full on the borders of New York."

A SMILE spread over the scout's swarthy features. He showed his stained teeth. "Aha! That is what they think, Monsieur Voolf and those others. At first, you understand, they were cautious. They surrounded

themselves with skirmishers at every move, they made blockhouses and little stone forts on every eminence in the forest about their camps, their roads, their landing places, rooting amongst the rocks and stumps like pigs—what a business! We had only a handful of savages to trouble them, and those were withdrawn into the forest by that rabbit Père Maillard as soon as the English approached the walls. We have snatched a few wigs—a sentry here, a straggler there—flea-bites, that is all. *Bien!* All this convinces Monsieur Voolf that he has nothing to fear from outside. He has strung his army all about the fortress, the harbor. He has brought guns to the lighthouse point to bombard the island battery, even to Lorambec." He leaned forward as was his habit when he wished to make a point. His black eyes shone. "And well behind those lines of his, *monsieur*, lies the English camp strung three miles along a low ridge in the swamps, from Point Platte into the heart of the forest. What a fine worm for a hungry bird!"

"And who is the bird? San Badees Koap?" asked Roger.

Again the yellow teeth. "Who but our Boishebert?"

"Boishebert!"

"You are astonished, *monsieur*? The English shall be no less, I assure you. Boishebert is at Port Toulouse, twenty leagues to the west, gathering his *coureurs de bois*, hurrying these wandering Micmacs toward the rendezvous. Villejouin will join him here with a force of militia from Ile Saint Jean, and other Acadians are on the way from the Miramichi shore—men who ran into the forest in '55 to escape the English expulsion, men with hate in their hearts like a flame that must devour or die. Yes! Along the coasts and through the forests they come, they gather—Indians, rangers, Acadians. And in a few days now he comes himself to the rendezvous—Boishebert, who has for three years defied the English to venture outside their forts in Acadie!"

"*Chansons! Chansons!*" Roger snapped to cover his uneasiness. "What can he raise? A thousand, two thousand men at most. The English have twelve thousand and the fleet besides."

"Ships cannot sail in the forest, Beau Soleil. As for their army, that is spread all the way from Cap Noir 'round to Lorambec, scattered through leagues of forest where a messenger must risk his scalp at every step. What can they do if Boishebert falls upon the camp? Who is to defend it? Several hundred camp followers—sutlers, waggoners, the women and children of the army, five hundred sick and wounded! A pretty crop of scalps, *non?*"

"You forget the English forces opposite the Dauphin Gate are only an hour's march from their camp."

"Good! That is all we ask, an hour! They dare not pursue us into the forest, these English soldiers who have never in their lives seen more than six trees together. If they do—*bien!* Boishebert will have such an opportunity as Beaujeu found when that wild bull Braddock crossed the Monongahela three years ago."

"And the English rangers?"

"Braddock's rangers did not save him. Do you know where Monsieur Voolf has posted his? In a stone fort in the forest behind the northeast harbor!"

"And where shall Boishebert get food and ammunition for this force of his?"

Gautier looked wise. "Somewhere, not far, is a great cache placed in the forest on orders of Monsieur Drucour, weeks ago. Only Boishebert knows where, lest the savages gobble it up beforehand. You see, we understand these matters, we French!"

"I see! And this—this massacre of the English sick and wounded, and their women and children—all this will save Louisburg?"

"Why not? The destruction of their camp and stores will delay the siege for weeks, and it is now well past the middle of July. Next month begins the season of autumn storms when the English fleet must leave the coast, lest it be caught and shattered as the Admiral 'Olborn was last year. Time! Time fights for us, Beau Soleil!"

He left, grinning. The hairy little man was confident—and close to Boishebert's councils, that was plain. Now he was off to Port Toulouse with the latest word of the English dispositions.

Roger thought of the long straggle of huts and tents, shut in by gloomy woods where Boishebert's savages, white and red, could move at ease; and the chosen time, some chilly dawn with a sea mist thick amongst the trees, dulling the sounds of attack and the cries of the victims; and the English army thundering away at Louisburg, oblivious of the slaughter until too late. A doleful fancy. He knew how easily it could be fact.

CHAPTER XXV

THE WARRIOR AND THE PRIEST

HE WAS still pondering these matters next day when an uproar broke out in the camp—dogs, shouts, the yammer of women, the slap and scurry of moccasins toward the waterside. It was all so like the old bad days at Shubenacadie that he was not surprised to hear the familiar scalp yell. It was taken up and screamed by the whole savage throng, even to the naked children.

He leaped to the wigwam entrance and saw the people milling about a tall and gorgeous figure. It was Koap—San Badees, holding high a pair of scalps still limp and bloody, and wearing as usual the red coat of a British soldier.

He was lean as a starved wolf from his three years' foray with Boishebert on the trails of Acadia. Below the coat skirt his long legs seemed all cords and bone. His war paint was grotesque: a wide black stripe encircled mouth and nose, and the rest of his face was a mass of red and orange bars. The deep eye-sockets were stained with red ochre, so that his black eyes glittered in a pair of scarlet cups. His head was shaved to a narrow scalp-lock in imitation of Boishebert's mission Indians, and to that ochre-dyed topknot, greased and stiffened with porcupine quills, he had pinned with a bone skewer one of the flat, richly-laced *chapeaux-bras* with which French officers minced about the streets of Louisburg. Slung to his shoulder were other trophies of his latest hunting, a British musket, cartridge pouch and bayonet.

Behind him in the throng a cassock fluttered and Roger had a glimpse of Father Maillard, the haggard and gentle prophet of these wastes. What was he doing here with Koap?

The scalp yells echoed across the water, where the Indians on the far side were running down to their canoes. Already there was a scuffle and yelping amongst the wigwams as the squaws and boys hunted down dogs for a scalp feast. In the midst of the hubbub Roger heard his own name uttered by several voices, with gestures toward the wigwam. He saw the painted face of San Badees contorted in a fierce and incredulous smile.

"Bosoley!"

Roger went cold. All the peace and indolence of the camp was gone in a trice, as if a north wind blew, and the air had a prickle of cruelty.

As if to forestall it, Père Maillard cried, "Surely this man is a guest in thy lodges, my children!"

Koap checked himself in full stride. "Dost thou say Bosoley is not our enemy, Paduleas? If he has gone over to the French, as the people say, still he is Bosoley and must answer for the blood of Peyal, Malti, Gobleal, Glode . . ." Slowly, sonorously, he recited a long list of warriors supposedly slain by Roger's men in the time gone by.

"WE HEAR thee, San Badees," broke in an old chief of the Bras D'Or. "But thy woman and that other who brought him told us that Bosoley bore the little fish and must not be harmed."

"Wah!" cried Koap with satisfaction. "It is time the little fish came back to us. Is this true?"—turning to the people.

"Weltaak!" they shouted together.

Roger considered rapidly. In a moment Koap would send a squaw to call him forth—a gesture of contempt which would not be lost on the attentive savages. Under the clothing his breast felt naked and defenseless without the amulet. How long would he live once Koap discovered its absence?

But there was no hesitation in the legs which had carried him to the rocks of Coromandière. They carried him out of the wigwam now with a steady and confident step, and the rest of him drew itself erect. He was conscious of his sorry finery, and he regretted his untended queue and the dense black beard, the growth of all these weeks at Soolakade. He had a somber sense of destiny, of fulfillment in some way. A gentleman should face such matters at his best.

The savages opened a way for him. A universal stare enfolded him from head to foot like a swimmer in a sea. Even Père Maillard stood aside in the edge of the crowd. Overhead the sky was blue, without a wisp of cloud, a rare day for Cape Breton in July, and the still waters of Soolakade reflected on their polished skin the green mass of the Miré hills.

The paint concealed Koap's expression, but his eyes glittered with a malevolent curiosity. He stood his ground with the air of an actor confident in his own magnificence and aware of a large and interested audience. He, at least, is dressed for his part, thought Roger, walking straight toward that bizarre figure. The silence was profound.

"O San Badees, I hear thy words," he declared clearly as he came. "But to whom should Bosoley render up the little fish? What man is worthy?"

"What warrior is greater than the others?" returned Koap promptly. "I am that one, and I am now the chief sagamore of all the Meeg-a-maage." He turned again to the crowd. *"Weltaak?"*

"Weltaak!" they answered.

There was no gainsaying his hold on them. He was one of those remarkable creatures spawned from time to time by warrior tribes, a man of great strength and ferocity, ambitious, treacherous in the gaining of his ends, and gifted with a rousing tongue. He had a passion for bloodshed, and The Otter's scheme for a confederacy of the Micmacs had provided him in one stroke with a theme and a weapon. Roger halted a few paces before him and folded his arms in the proper attitude for Micmac oratory. Only wit could save him, that was clear. But he was aware of an urgent something to be accomplished, something more than the mere saving of his own skin. What was it? Like a traveler benighted in a Highland pass, he groped for stones in the path while sensing mountains right and left.

"O San Badees, thy mouth is full of boasting, but where are thy deeds? Lo, I traveled the forest many summers and winters and saw no more of San Badees than that he was The Otter's footprint! Now The Otter is gone and so thou turn to Boishebert, because thou must have someone to say to thee, 'Do this, do that,'

O man, thou art a footprint still, and what is that but a mark in the dust? One day a rain shall wash thee out."

"I hear a rain of words," replied Koap mockingly. What was he turning in that crafty mind?

"*Jiksutaan!* Hark!" Roger snapped. In the still heat of the afternoon there sounded a mutter from the east. "The English thunder, my brothers. There, O San Badees, is a storm that some day soon shall blow thee away and all who follow thee."

Koap grinned. "O Bosoley," he sneered, "the little fish has made thee bold. Thy tongue is sharp because it knows no man may shed the blood of him who wears it."

ROGER evaded that delicate subject. He addressed himself to the people.

"Brothers, how many winters more must ye listen to the whistling of evil birds and take the hatchet in the quarrel of the French against the English? There be old men amongst ye who have never known the sunshine of peace. Scalps ye have taken, and heads; and ye have made prisoners and beaten them until they wept, sometimes until they died, and ye have burned them with brands and with hot irons, and plucked out their nails and hair, and stripped the skin from the living flesh; and oftentimes the French rewarded ye with blankets and guns and firewater according to thy deeds.

"But ye have paid in blood for all these pleasures, O people of the Meeg-a-maage. Where is Peyal? Where is Malti? Gobleal? Glode? Flanswa? . . ." He went on through the list that Koap had recited, name for name, as nearly as he could remember it, all in the deep, slow, nasal voice which Koap had used, with his head cocked at Koap's angle, and sweeping out his right arm in the gesture Koap loved to use.

A flicker of brown grins ran over the throng, their eyes lighted with gleeful surprise. This was a form of humor they had never seen. And it was sharpened by Koap's own grotesquerie—the coat, the lean protruding legs, the *chapeau-bras* perched on his shaven skull, the painted face dripping dyed sweat in the sunshine.

So far so good; but Roger saw in them no friendliness toward himself. They were amused, they hung on every word, they were eager for the outcome, seeing Koap's hate-distended eyes; but their faces had the expectancy of boys about a pair of snarling dogs, their eyes were lit with the careless cruelty of children.

"Bosoley," said San Badees softly through his teeth, "put by the totem and let us see if thee can say amusing things."

Again Roger ignored him, saying soberly to the gathering, "Brothers, what have the long wars brought but sorrow to the Meeg-a-maage? The crows have picked the bones of thy bravest warriors. Their scalps hang in the lodges of the Long Knives. The Otter promised ye many things. Where is The Otter now? The *Aglaseaou* have taken him captive on the far side of the Big Water. Where are the *Wenjoo* folk of Acadie who gave ye food and shelter on the war path? The *Aglaseaou* have burned their villages and carried them to Bostoon and beyond.

"Do ye remember how, twelve summers since, the whitecoats came to Chebucto with many ships and men as thick as leaves? Where are they now? Who sits at Chebucto? Do ye remember how the whitecoats beat their war-drums every night at Beauséjour? Where are they now? Who sits at Beauséjour?

"Brothers, how have ye been so long deceived? What magic have the *Wenjoo* to match the war medicine of the *Aglaseaou*? *Jiksutaan!* Hear it! There speaks the thunder of the English and the doom of Louisburg! They rain their lightnings on it—ye have seen these things—the walls crumble and the towers fall. And could ye stand before *that*, O fools?"

"*Weltaak!*" grunted a petty chief from the Musquodoboit, nodding.

"Brothers, what do ye here in this corner of the Foggy Country? Why have ye given up the hunting grounds of thy fathers, ye men of Piziquid, of Wejooik, of Piktook . . . M'tatamagouche . . . Chignecto . . . Miramichi . . . Lustigouche . . . Shubenacadie . . . Tawopskik . . . Kejumkujik? Are there more fish in these cold rivers? Are the caribou more fat in the barrens of Soolakade? What say ye, does the bull moose come swifter to the call here than in the hills of Cobequid?"

"We came here for the French king's bounty," said a man of the M'tatamagouche sullenly.

"*Wah!* I see the moccasins of my brothers worn with hunting in these hills, I see the squaws lean from their long traveling. I see their children famished as the dogs. I see my brothers with rusty guns and worn-out knives and tomahawks. I see their blankets gone to rags. Tell me, O man, is this the French king's bounty?"

There was no answer from them. It was Koap who spoke, with a note of triumph in his anger, as if some twist of cunning had shown him at last the nice solution of a problem. "O Bosoley, thou talk in riddles and make laughter in the mouths of fools!" And then, with a surprising meekness, "I cannot fight thee for the totem of my people as my heart desires, lest blood he spilled and bring upon me the vengeance of the Sakawachkik. Yet there is a way to tell which is the better warrior, thou or I, without offending the law of the Ancient Ones."

"I find no fear in me," Roger said. "What is this thing?"

"*Kokwadega!*"

A delighted scream sprang from all the camp.

"Come, let us strive together as the young

men do," pursued Koap cunningly, "and let the prize be possession of the little fish!"

Again the tumult of approval. Roger gritted his teeth. Caught! Caught, with his eyes wide open! In good hard health he might have been a match for Koap in the Micmac form of wrestling; there was a time when he might have exulted in the challenge—but that was before the months of ease in Halifax, and now he had lain six weeks recovering from that unlucky shot at Coromandière.

He had seen *kokwadega*, a brutal sport, all strength and savagery with no rules, no ground marks, no time limit—and woe to the vanquished. He had seen arms and necks twisted and broken, and once, disgusted, he had witnessed the strangling of an opponent lying senseless on the ground, with all the people laughing 'round about.

Already Koap was throwing off the fantastic hat and the bloody English coat. He stood naked to clout and moccasins, showing broad, muscular shoulders and the narrow hips, the corded arms and legs of a hunter. His brown skin shone with grease.

Slowly Roger shed the yellow waistcoat—and no more. To remove his shirt would reveal the absence of the totem. Grimly he meditated on the difference between a slit throat and a broken neck, so important to the Ancient Ones, such damned small comfort to the man who lost the bout.

Was this the end? He refused to believe it. Yet he knew that Koap could wear him down in twenty minutes by sheer strength alone—in less if he could get home one of the brutal tricks of the game. And once he was worn down, there would be no mercy. He cursed the loss of the amulet. What a strength it had been to him! Without it, he felt sapless and lost.

THE Indians were in high excitement, jostling for a better view, laughing in their husky, high-pitched Micmac voices. Most had never seen Bosoley until he appeared so strangely in their camp, but they had heard of the mysterious white man who possessed the totem, who traveled Acadie like the wind, whose word moved ships and companies of men, whose anger followed his enemies into the uttermost nooks of the forest. And here he was in the flesh, about to strive with San Badees to the death—San Badees who had slain with his own hand the English sagamore Howe, San Badees who had been forerunner to The Otter, San Badees the terror of every Englishman in Acadie, San Badees the greatest warrior between the Fog Land and the Great River of Canada! They lifted their voices in a great *"Hé!"* as Koap rushed forward.

Roger swerved to avoid a hurtling weight of muscle and bone and outstretched claws. He clutched at the naked waist without a clear notion of what to do. They went to earth with a crash and struggled on the ground. In a moment Koap had him about the ribs, crushing his sore chest painfully. His shirt was smeared with paint as the hard face dug itself into his shoulder. He half-expected the grinning teeth to fasten on his ear in the manner of *kokwadega;* but that would have drawn forbidden blood, of course. Nevertheless, he worked up a hand to the painted jaw and thrust it back violently, lest it yield to temptation, and was relieved to feel that rib-cracking embrace give way. He rolled clear and they scrambled to their feet. He was gasping already from the pain in his chest and simple breathlessness.

Again the warrior sprang, and again Roger sought to avoid that overpowering brown missile. There was a disapproving murmur from the crowd. Already the camp's sympathies were set. After all, Koap was one of their own—and they had the leaning of primitives toward the winning side. Some of the younger braves were crying out, urging San Badees to make an end of the white man now, to throw him down and wring his neck.

The wrestlers went to earth again, and again there was a desperate struggle on the ground. Craftily, ruthlessly, Koap thrust elbows and knees where they would hurt most, struck hard blows with his bony fist, butted with his shaven head. A knee shoved into his groin made Roger writhe. He was still too strong to be throttled. But Koap seized the moment and leaped up, leaped into the air, aiming his whole weight and his hard heels at the undefended belly on the ground.

"Hé!" cried the braves again.

Roger rolled and took the shock on his flank. His side felt crushed. Nevertheless, he seized the brown legs and with a wild heave flung Koap to earth and grappled with him swiftly, seeking to apply that neck-lock the Lancashire man had taught him long ago. But he was baffled by his own weakness. Again and again he sought the hold, only to be turned aside by one of Koap's crude strong twists or to find his grip lost on the sweating brown skin.

Again the brutal pummeling. The strength oozed out of him by invisible wounds wherever those hard knees and fists and elbows struck home. He could only cling and hope for survival while his mind sought a way to save him. Surely there must be a way! His chest, his belly, his whole body ached intolerably, his mouth gaped in the effort to breathe. His head sang with that whistling roar which children listen to in conch shells, and all about him the ring of savage faces seemed to waver like a seacoast seen far off in August weather. One face alone was clear, and that only for a passing moment: Wapke's, with an expression vehement and strange.

Somehow he broke clear and staggered to his feet, holding body and wits together by a will

to survive. Somewhere behind the conch-roar in his skull, the desperate mind still sought a way. Something! Something! And the struggle went on, the fury of arms and bodies and threshing legs, the breaking apart, the new leap of the great brown cat body, the bruising shock, the fall, the gasping contortions on the hard-packed earth. And always the weakness growing, and triumph growing in the face of Koap.

They broke apart once more and as Roger crouched, panting, bracing his unsteady legs for Koap's next rush, the Indian laughed and cried aloud, "O Bosoley, begin thy death-song now. For soon now I shall take thy life from thee as I took Wapke—without the shedding of thy blood!"

It came to Roger then, out of nowhere, like a flash of powder in a darkened room: Manchester, Prince Charlie's camp in the melancholy Lancashire weather, the evening wrestlers defying rain and mud, the Cumberland men and their eternal talk of "chips," the Westmoreland men and theirs—cross-buttock, back-heel, buttock, hank, click—words, incomprehensible words . . . the Highlandmen and their rude hugging and hurling . . . the Lancashire men and their swifter catch-and-throw which drew the better crowd . . . And then, suddenly, the slim dark man from Cornwall stepping into the circle with a challenge to Carlyle Jock. Jock and his terrible swinging-hipe! Jock stepping forward briskly for the hipe . . . The dark man putting out a hand and turning sharply away . . . And suddenly Jock, great Carlyle Jock, sailing over the slim man's shoulder and diving to earth, head first. He remembered the open-mouthed amazement of them all, and how still Jock lay, and how some said it was a damned ill trick, and how the Cornishman explained the flying-mare and swore it was a proper throw where he came from. How did it go? Aye, how?

Koap bounded forward, sweat-shining, paint-smeared, a nightmare figure, weird as the Micmac notion of Death itself. The thin lips sneered back from his strong teeth. His eyes widened a little when Roger made no attempt to avoid his rush.

The Englishman put out a hand, caught Koap's right wrist and turned away swiftly, stooping, heaving, dragging the hard brown arm over his shoulder. What followed was amazing to them all. San Badees seemed to climb feet first into the air, head down, indeed head falling, right arm pinioned, left arm flailing wildly at nothing. For a flying moment he seemed poised with feet to the sky, and then he dived to earth headlong. There was a thud at the Englishman's feet and a moment later the gleaming brown body bounced on the hard camp ground like a felled tree. There it lay very still, with arms and legs outflung. The mouth gaped and from it came a hideous snoring sound. The eyes showed only their bloodshot whites. The stiff scalp-lock was flattened and matted with bits of trodden brown grass. The eyes, the smudged paint, the trickle of blood from the flaring nostrils, the weird sounds in the yawning throat, all made a frightful object from which the Indians recoiled in awe.

The wizened Bras D'Or chief spoke respectfully, "This is magic, brothers. Mad indeed was San Badees to challenge him who wore the little fish. O Bosoley, show us the totem now, that our eyes may see fortune in the days to come, when we go with Boishebert against the English camp."

Roger had fallen to his knees, too spent to care a whit. With cynical humor he drew from his pocket and flung on the ground the shattered bits of stone, the queerly carved back fin, the thong by which it had hung about his neck so long.

"Behold! It is finished, like the Sakawachkik, the Ancient Ones, who made it and whose bones were scattered long ago. So is thy fortune—and mine!"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE MAKING OF A MIRACLE

FOR a full minute all was still. Then a hubbub sprang up on all sides at once, as if the camp had one voice—and that a shriek of anger and despair. Roger looked up and saw a knife in every hand, or so it seemed, and already the squaws were scuttling off to the wigwams for the hatchets of their lords. And it was odd to see how, even now, they retained some fear of him, for those who met his direct glance dropped a hand to their flanks, concealing the knife behind the thigh, and the voices yelling loudest for his blood were those from the back of the throng. But he had no illusions. They were working themselves up to killing pitch and it would not take them long. The knives were itching in their hands. In a few moments now the charmed circle would be broken by the pressure from behind, and then would come a brown, snarling rush, the short blades rising and falling, the bloody end. A pity, after coming so far and weathering so much, but perhaps this way was best. The whole pattern of his destiny had been changed at Coromandière, and for the worse, as far as fortune went. The future was a ruin, like Louisburg itself. Mary? He could see the scorn in Mary's eyes, hearing the tale of De Gannes.

The brown ring surged, and in that moment someone rushed from behind and stood against him crying, *"Nenkoodam!* Stop!" He felt the sweep of a skirted garment against his shoulder. Wapke? He looked up and saw that it was the missionary, Père Maillard, standing with arms upraised like the figure on his little crucifix. The old man's face was alight with passion. His

thin voice pierced the tumult like a sword. The distorted faces gave back a little, muttering.

"Before ye slay this man, ye must slay me," Père Maillard said.

A young brave spoke. "This man who stole the totem of our people now has broken it, and for that he must die. Stand aside, Paduleas, for we do not wish thee harm."

"Nor do I wish thee harm!" the fluting voice cried. "Will ye never learn? Ye have told me

Roger caught Koap's wrist and dragged the hard brown arm over his shoulder. For a moment the Indian seemed poised with feet to sky, then he dived to earth headlong.

how in the olden time the great spirit Glooskap steered his canoe into the sunset and left six moons of winter to the Meeg-a-maage forever. Why did he go? What did he tell the Ancient Ones? 'O Quarrelers, the blood of men is always on thy hands!' "

"True," a Bras D'Or warrior said. "Yet Glooskap left the little fish to be a pledge that every winter should be followed by a spring,

when the Meeg-a-maage might journey down the rivers and live fat beside the Big Water. What is our totem now?"

"Behold!" Père Maillard plucked the crucifix from his breast and held it up dramatically. "Here is thy true and only totem now, O people of the Meeg-a-maage, thy pledge from the great Munitoo who made all things in earth and sea. What was the little fish to this?"

"*Wah!*" said a man of the Cobequid people. "The Otter gave me a Jesus-totem to wear about my neck that it might save me from harm, and sprinkled water upon me and gave me a spirit name, Mahlee-Sosep, even as he called Koap San Badees. What was the virtue of these things? When we fought the redcoats by the waters of Chebucto, one of their Mohawk soldiers smote me with a tomahawk and cut my shoulder to the bone. When we fought with them at Beauséjour a ball went in my leg and I lay a whole winter with a great fire in my flesh from hip to knee. And here is a strange thing. When we took the winter war-path with the French and slew the redcoat Noble in the snow, certain of the English lay dead under our hands with the Jesus-totem slung about their necks. What is the meaning of these things?"

"O man," the priest said, "he lied who gave thee the Jesus-totem for war medicine. The Jesus-totem is peace medicine."

"Who says this thing?" asked the Kejumkujik chief, doubtfully.

Roger staggered to his feet. "The Paduleas says this thing! The Otter was a liar. The words of the Paduleas are clear as the waters of a spring."

There was a stir in the edge of the crowd. Two squaws were picking up the snoring form of San Badees and dragging him away. One of them was Wapke, her face expressionless as wood.

"Brothers!" Père Maillard said. "Thy hunting grounds lie all the way from the Foggy Country to Chegoggin, and from Chebucto to the shore of the Great River. The English make their towns upon the coasts in places far from one another, for they are fishermen, not hunters, and their living lies upon the Big Water. So be it, then. The land is wide, the Big Water is wide, and all we are very small."

"*We-la-boog-wa,*" murmured several. "These are good words."

"Brothers, San Badees talked to thee always of war. It is easy to talk of war. Squaws, children can talk of war. But when blood flows, what words can pour it back into the wound? The Meeg-a-maage are brave warriors. So are the French. So are the English. Have they not proved themselves all through the time of thy fathers and thine own? And is the hunting better? Are there more fish in the Big Water? Does the cold pinch less in winter for the blood that flowed in summer? The smoke in the wigwam—does it smart the eye less because a new scalp dries upon the pole?

"Brothers, there is a time for war and we have had much war. The death-song of the warrior has silenced the birds in the forest. The wailing of the squaws is like the east wind in the reeds. Is there no time for peace?"

Silence. But it was a different silence now. The old man had caught them in the gust of his passion. Their eyes were brooding but the hate was gone. They looked at him in something close to awe and frequently stole glances at the crucifix glinting in the sunshine. But some of the young braves stirred.

One said, "These are the words of a coward. These are the words of the English, who have sought peace with us many times." The speaker had a harelip.

"My brother is fresh from his mother's paps!" Roger snapped. "His mouth is split with much sucking. Who is he to talk before warriors?"

The young squaws giggled. The harelip scowled and showed a long white tooth. "They fear who talk of peace," he insisted.

The Musquodoboit chief reproved him, saying gravely, "If the English wish to bury the hatchet, it is not from fear. At Chebucto when the redcoats walk together to make spirit medicine on the seventh day, they seem as many as red maples in the forest when the frost is come; the earth shakes when their feet come down together, they make strong sounds with drums and reeds, and carry banners, and their sagamores wear shining things and the feathers of unearthly birds. Their eyes are proud, their faces have no fear. I have seen these things."

AGAIN a silence. At last the withered old sagamore of the Kejumkujik stepped forward and addressed the people slowly.

"Brothers, in the olden time the great spirit Glooskap foretold that a race of pale men should come out of the sunrise and rule the Meeg-a-maage, and when the *Wenjoo* came in their great canoes our fathers said, '*Ka-kei-ke-sed-wom-ke.* It is fulfilled.' Then came the redcoats, and we have fought against them for the *Wenjoo* many years. But the redcoats had strong medicine and made great war; they have driven the *Wenjoo* from all the valley of Tawopskik, from Beauséjour as well, and now they and their thunder come to Louisburg. Soon must the *Wenjoo* go from this the last of Acadie, and who are we to fight alone against the *Aglaseaou* and their medicine? Brothers, let us go with the Paduleas then toward the west, to our old hunting grounds, and bury the hatchet with the English at Chebucto."

A Lahave chief spoke doubtfully. "Behold, we have no food, and there is barren hunting in these hills. Our squaws, our children cry for meat even now. How can we leave toward

the west without any *moosok* in our baskets?"

"*Wah!*" cried He-Whose-Mouth-Is-Split, with his ferocious sneer. "Thou say the Jesus-totem can work miracles, O Paduleas! Let us see it now provide us food and lead and powder, blankets and knives and hatchets for the long journey to the west!"

Père Maillard continued to hold the crucifix above his head. Beads of sweat stood on his brow and tonsure. A muscle in his brown cheek twitched. He was in agony, yet he would not lower his totem while the issue was in doubt. Whatever was in these dark minds, he had full faith in its power. He spoke that faith now, passionately.

"Brothers, the great Munitoo, who provided bread for His people in the wilderness long ago, will provide for thee also. It is written in the God-book, of which I have told ye many times."

The old Kejumkujik chief was nodding. All the chiefs were nodding. Père Maillard turned slowly, holding high the crucifix, surveying all those solemn brown faces, one by one. What he saw there satisfied him, for he lowered the Jesus-totem at last and commanded, "Go then, and prepare to strike the wigwams in the morning. And rest well, for the way is far."

The crowd swayed, parted, scattered slowly to their wigwams, murmuring on these strange events like people in a trance. A handful of young braves lingered, staring at the fragments of the little fish upon the ground. Father Maillard stepped forward, picked up the pieces and the thong and, wordless, flung them into the river.

It was a wakeful night. The whole camp was restless. There was much prowling and talking. Distance lent beauty as well as bounty to the old hunting grounds; of peace with the English they were not so sure. The war had been going on so long that it was part of their lives, like the little fish itself. Must they part with every keepsake of the Ancient Ones?

ROGER had invited Père Maillard to share the wigwam which had been his all these weeks. At first the old man talked excitedly about the work to be done, once the Micmacs were back in their hunting grounds and at peace with the English.

"Amongst many things, *monsieur*, I have long cherished a notion to prepare an account of these people, so the world may know something of them; but first a grammar of their tongue, a system of symbols, translations of the Scriptures, so they may read the word of God for themselves when I am no longer here to read it for them."

After a time he seemed troubled, and began to pray. Roger felt exhausted and sank on his couch thankfully, but sleep was fitful and whenever he wakened there was the venerable figure still on its knees, praying aloud in the dark. The drone of its supplications carried beyond the skins and poles of the wigwam, and frequently a voice outside somewhere drove away the whining dogs, crying, "*Jeaulaase!* Begone! The Paduleas talks to his mother, the Virgin Mahlee."

Toward morning Roger said to him softly, "You are troubled, Father?"

"I am aware of difficulties, *monsieur*."

"You mean Koap?"

"Koap is one, *monsieur*. In the morning he will have a sore head and a stiff neck, and an evil temper. That man is a devil. A human neck would have been broken by that fall. Tomorrow we start our long pilgrimage with this serpent in our midst. You know his influence. And if the miracle should not come to pass—"

"Be assured, there will be manna in the wilderness, Father."

"Ah, *monsieur*, you, too—you, too, have faith!"

"I can even tell you where to look for it."

"Eh?" The old man's voice was startled in the darkness.

"Softly, softly! Soolakade is what the French call Miré River, is it not?"

"Yes, a little way below this camp the stream becomes very broad—some call that part of it *le lac* Miré—and it flows in a half circle through the hills behind Chapeau Rouge Bay and Louisburg. That is why Boishebert wished the savages to gather here. These waters, which the English neither know nor care about, afford a route by which he can attack any part of their positions."

"That is what I suspected. Where is Boishebert now?"

"On the way up the coast from Port Toulouse. Somewhere about Saint Esprit, or perhaps as far as Fourchu. Quite near, I am afraid, *monsieur*."

"Ah! Then you must first direct the people northward along the lake of Miré. I am told there is a portage over the hills to the waters of Bras D'Or. There you have a canoe route toward Acadie, is it not so?"

"Yes. It is long and hard, but we can go that way."

"Regard then, *mon père!* As you paddle north along the lake of Miré you pass the end of the woodcutters' road from Louisburg."

"Well?"

"Past that place, a half mile perhaps, a small stream comes down from the east to join the waters of Soolakade. There is a ravine bordered by dense forest, well hidden from the lake. In its shadows, well covered with sail canvas and brushwood, you will find all that your people need for their migration—provisions, powder, lead, salt, clothing, blankets, tinderboxes, muskets, hatchets—everything. There is even some rum, but you had better stave the kegs before the young braves get wind of that."

"But how—I do not understand—"

"Must you understand? Where is your faith, *mon père?*"

"I have my faith!"

"No doubt Monsieur Druceur could tell you why these goods were hidden in the forest, but it seems to me they were placed there so that God—or Father Maillard, let us say—could work a miracle."

The old man was torn between delight and doubt.

"But, to steal!"

"Did the children of Israel steal the manna *they* found in the wilderness?"

"Ah, *monsieur! . . . monsieur!*"

THE morning was cool, with a low mist along the valley, and the still air of the camp humid with scents of wet grass and fir forest. Roger turned on his couch. Robins were whistling at the edge of the trees and there was music of song sparrows by the water. The simple sounds and odors came to him with an astonishing freshness. My God, he thought, I haven't noticed a flower at the wayside or heard a bird sing in five years! What's been the matter with me?

The camp came to life with a murmur, with a yawning and stretching of humans and dogs, the crackle and snap of cooking fires, the morning procession of squaws with pots toward the water. The night's fast was broken with such scraps of food as could be gathered, and after Père Maillard had performed a morning devotion the squaws fell upon the wigwams and the men and boys prepared to launch the canoes.

One wigwam stood when all the rest were down, conspicuous in the trampled emptiness between the forest and the river. The door blanket was drawn and nothing moved. The people moved toward it slowly, with curious faces and some awe. Roger and Père Maillard pulled the ragged stroud aside.

In the shaft of light through the doorway they saw Wapke's face, daubed with a mess of grease and charcoal that startled them both and awakened in Roger a rush of memories. She was squatting on the rush mat by the couch of her lord as if she waited for him to rise. But San Badees would never rise this side of the Good Hunting Place. He lay on his side with knees drawn up a little, with the English bayonet driven through his skull into the ground. A pool of thick blood lay congealing with a stone beside it.

"My daughter," said Père Maillard gently, "what is this thing?"

Wapke's mouth parted the black mask. Hoarsely, but with pride, she said to him, "Bless me, Paduleas, for I have slain him as the woman slew the warrior in the God-book. He was evil. It was time for him to die."

A small clearing on the east bank of *le lac* Miré marked the farthest venture of the Louisburg woodcutters. The savages drew into the bank, gunwale to gunwale, a wild and picturesque mass on the shining water. They were no vast number, Roger realized now that he saw them all together, no more than the lash on the human whip which Le Loutre had cracked at Beauséjour in '55. The rest of it was still coiling through eastern Nova Scotia and along the Bras D'Or toward the rendezvous. Father Maillard would turn it back as he journeyed westward.

"They have been three years on this migration," he observed. "They should return in two, for after all they are going home. Sometime during the winter of '60—yes, about then I think—the sagamore will appear at Halifax to make their peace. All then will depend upon the English; I can answer for the savages. If your people are wise, there shall be a peace never broken. And when I have seen the hatchet buried at last, then I can go to my rest in God, through the mercy of Our Lady of Sorrows." He crossed himself devoutly. "My son, I have been twenty-three years in the wilderness."

How old and frail he looked! But there was a light in the weak blue eyes. Whatever happened on that long and arduous journey, the flame in Father Maillard would burn unto the promised land.

A few sagamores stepped ashore with him, grunting farewells to Roger with the indifference of their race, but one of them, the old Kejumkujik chief, said bluntly, pointing to the road, "Thou go to fight, and yet thou talk of peace!"

"I go to seek a woman, who alone can give me peace."

The chief nodded and turned away, saying in parting, "We shall meet again, Bosoley."

"I do not know," said Roger honestly.

"We know," the chief said calmly, and trod silently down to his canoe. The people were eager to be off. Somewhere, not far now, the Paduleas had promised them a miracle.

Beyond the low hills to the eastward came a steady mutter of guns.

"You know what that means, my son?"

"What, Father?"

"The end of Louisburg. Once before I saw the English conquer Louisburg—and give it back. This time they will not leave one stone upon another."

"I understand. My wealth is gone," answered Roger dully. "It is strange. For years I have believed in nothing but myself—and the little stone fish, which brought me fortune. The world was mine, for I owed allegiance to no one. I followed my destiny to Louisburg—my treasure and my heart, you remember? But at Coromandière all my life was changed in twenty minutes. I go now to witness my own ruin, and it may well be that *Mademoiselle* herself will turn a cold face to the man who

would not fight for France. Yet I have no regret. What does it mean? Have I gone mad?"

The lean hand rested a moment on his shoulder.

Father Maillard smiled, the smile of a withered saint. "When that pagan thing was broken, you lost everything, you say? Yet you have something in return."

"But what?"

"Your soul."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE GOLDEN WOMAN

WITH his soul then, and weaponless, Roger walked through the long July afternoon toward that sinister rumble of giants. The track was narrow and rough, a mere slot in the wilderness, cut by the French long ago in search of decent timber for the fortress. From Gautier he knew the distance to be something close on twenty miles, winding amongst bogs and rocky ridges. About halfway it passed within a mile or two of Chapeau Rouge Bay. It would have been easy there to turn off through the scrub woods to the shore, to hail one of the transport parties cutting fuel or filling water casks, and to see the issue safely from the deck of an English ship. They would not question him far; the woods were full of English wanderers, soldiers, sailors, camp followers. The chance of another encounter with Wolfe he could well risk.

But the sound of cannon drew him eastward like a deep chanting of siren voices, although he saw no siren faces, only Mary, Mary always—Mary in danger, Mary in pain, Mary dying or dead. The urge to reach her set him running sometimes like a madman, to pull up at last panting and sweat-sodden, to fling himself down like a parched beast at a wayside pool in a swarm of black-flies, to stumble on again. As he drew toward the end of the long miles, where the road left its easterly course and turned south, the rumble had become a rapid succession of thunderclaps in front, each detonation clearly marked, gun by gun. He recalled Gautier saying how Monsieur "Voolf" had thrust across the swamps from Flat Point to the west end of Louisburg harbor and erected batteries on the high ground above the *barachois*—just as the "Bastonnais" had done in '45. So the British west attack was sitting astride the Miré road just where it joined the track around the harbor. He had not given these matters much thought. Confronted by the resounding fact, he rejected the southerly turn of the road and kept on eastward through the woods. Before long he stood on the shore of a small lake. A brook flowed out of it toward the southeast. The size of the trees had been dwindling steadily all the way from the Miré and now he was amongst spindling stuff, cat-spruce and juniper, the sure mark of the Louisburg shore. He followed the little stream until he saw the northeast harbor shimmering in the last of the twilight, surrounded by shadowy woods.

From the direction of Lighthouse Point snapped Wolfe's east attack. Roger crept along the fringe of the open until he could see their red stabs in the dusk, and the bombshells bursting over Battery Island in little showers of sparks. The island replied. A little red eye glowed for a moment here and there. It looked and sounded feeble.

Immediately to his right on the foreshore sat the Grand Battery, built to rake the harbor entrance—as if the crossfire from the Island Battery were not enough. It was gutted by fire but showed no mark of attack. The tall stone towers stood bold against the evening sky. Evidently the French had abandoned it and withdrawn into the fortress on Wolfe's approach through the woods.

To the south across the anchorage lay Rochefort Point with Louisburg squatting black against the seaward sky. There was some firing from the ramparts, but it seemed dull and spiritless compared with the energetic beating of the British guns. Siege batteries were firing from hillocks in the swamps southwest of the town, from Green Hill and from the ridge north of the *barachois*, yes, and from the low knolls to the south of it. The British must have pushed their trenches almost to the morning shadow from the Dauphin Gate!

There were fires in the town. Roger could make out a smudged red glow in several quarters, and a long mass of black smoke hung over all like a tester over a bed. His skin crept with anxiety. It seemed an age before utter darkness permitted him to cross the harbor road and explore the shore. There on the little peeled-pole *cales* of the departed fishermen he found two or three shallops and felt over them carefully. They had been staved with axes but there was one whose strakes were broken in two places only. It stank of fish. Beside the nearest of the burned huts lay odds and ends of every sort known to the fishery, amongst them a prize—an oar of whittled spruce. He picked up some rags of canvas and stuffed the holes in the boat, and at some hour short of midnight pushed off boldly into the murk, sculling the shallop along.

A strange voyage. The water was thick with flotsam—spars, sails, cordage, planks, casks, fittings, the forlorn buoys of slipped anchors, raffle of a hundred sorts, with an illusion of movement, creeping out of the gloom ahead. He had a queasy feeling that some of the mysterious objects nudging stupidly along the boat's sides were dead men, bloated and buoyant, and when from time to time his oar touched one of them he had an impulse to yell.

What did it mean, all this? It looked as if the French fleet had been destroyed, or a good part of it at any rate. That ass Des Gouttes! He had refused to sail out and tackle Boscawen at Chapeau Rouge, with a windward gauge and all the advantage of a purely fighting force against an enemy cumbered with transports. He had sat in the roadstead, removed most of his men and stores ashore, and so left idle a floating battery of nearly five hundred guns while the British crept about the harbor shore and set up batteries to destroy it!

Roger estimated the distance at a mile and a half. It seemed much farther in the dark. The shallop crept despite his urgent efforts. For a long time he had a suspicion that the tide or some harbor current held it back, or swept him slowly toward the careening cove and Wolfe's guns on the east. But gradually the hot red tongues of Lighthouse Point fell past his left shoulder, the flare and belch of the British mortars north of the *barachois* drew abreast on the right. In mid-harbor he seemed to be in the vortex of the siege, with batteries spewing fire into the night on every side but the south. From east, north, west and southwest the British guns were speaking with a tireless violence. Sometimes he thought he could trace the red dot of a bomb fuse sailing in a slow arc through the darkness and falling on the town. *God help my darling under that rain!*

AS HIS shallop approached the big three-deckers anchored under the guns of La Grève, a few lanterns glimmered from the ports. Des Gouttes was keeping anchor watches, then. This gave him some uneasiness, expecting a challenge and a blast of grapeshot at the sound of his lone oar, which groaned against the stern slot in a doleful way. But there was a spectacular diversion. One of the shells falling into the great Bastion du Roi appeared to touch off some woodwork and in a few minutes a great blaze appeared. It seemed to be the governor's residence, at the south end of the long barracks which formed the town side of the citadel. As the red light grew he saw that the barracks were gone already, burned out in some previous fire, and with them the tall clock spire, the garrison bakery, the officers' quarters and chapel.

The glare threw into relief the hulls and rigging of two big ships anchored so close to La Grève that they must almost be aground. He recognized them—*Bienfaisant* and *Prudent*. Where were the other three ships of the line? The light of the fire, reflected bloodily on the shoals outside the *barachois*, revealed to his startled gaze three burned-out skeletons of charred timber and seared ironwork and tumbled tiers of guns, still giving off a pale haze of steam. Undoubtedly *Célèbre, Entreprenant* and *Capricieux*. Roger had seen them last looking potent and magnificent in the anchorage amongst the frigates. And what had become of them—*Arethuse, Chevre, Apollo, Fidele, Biche*? Escaped? Sunk to bar the channel? Or simply sunk? The littered harbor told a somber tale of some of them, that was sure.

There was no challenge from the battery of La Grève, nor from the anchor-watches in *Prudent* and *Bienfaisant:* all eyes were on the burning Bastion du Roi. He sculled in to the shadowy beach of the smugglers through a sargasso of tobacco leaves, and thought, *How easy after all!* How simple it would have been for a British night assault, a golden opportunity for that wild man Wolfe unless the narrow sqeak at Coromandière had sobered him.

Roger walked over the steeply shelving beach delicately to avoid a rattling of stones. The surface of the little lagoon gleamed in the light of the fire across the town, except where the Maurepas Bastion and the staked bridge cast long shadows on the water. The night seemed full of eyes and cocked muskets. He took off his shoes and tied them about his neck and waded out to swimming depth. The water was warm. He swam slowly but for all his care the ripples seemed to rush away toward the waiting sentinels and the sounds of the bombardment were lost in the swish of water past his ears. But he felt the gunfire; whenever a bombshell fell in the cobbled streets the water seemed to strike his body a blow that tingled the whole skin.

Fortunately it was not far to the shadows of the bridge. Then he was groping along the slimy stakes for the smugglers' gap, and shaking the water out of his ears for better hearing. No sign or sound of a sentinel on the bridge. He could hear an excited chatter from the Maurepas Bastion. The whole garrison seemed fascinated by that conflagration in the citadel.

The gap at last! He passed under the causeway and swam on, as silent as a muskrat. Another hundred yards and his hands grasped the wet stone stairs of the boatmen's landing which led to the Rue du Quai. He paused in the shadow of a warehouse to strip and wring the water from his clothes. He was shivering in the warm air of the summer night. So near!

He put on the clammy things, laced his broken shoes and stole up the alley. The clamor of the siege filled all the world, but in the lulls there was a silence of death. The mean habitations along the alley were deserted. There were gaps, and the customary smell of fish had given place to a reek of charred wood and worse. At the Rue Dauphine he stared into the gloom toward the fish market and saw nothing. The stone walls of nearby warehouses made dim angular shapes a little darker than the night, that was all, and against the stars a pattern of rafters gnawed by fire. Everywhere was that smell of burning. A few dogs prowled and somewhere in a ruin a cat mewled piteously.

He turned up the Rue Dauphine, stumbling over fallen timbers and rubble and choking in gusts of smoke that seemed to come from a brisk fire toward the Rue du Rempart.

Encouraged by the blaze in the citadel the British gunners redoubled their efforts. Their aim seemed to converge upon the Bastion du Roi and the Bastion de la Reine, with some attention to the Dauphin defenses at the all-important west gate; but bombs from their mortars were less fixed of purpose, sailing high over the ramparts and falling in clusters on the town.

He turned into the Rue d'Orléans and kept along the north side. He found the hospital without difficulty—the handsome facade was lit by nearby fires. The tall spire, so long a landmark to the fishermen, had made a good mark for the British gunners; yet it stood like a finger pointing into the smoke. The roof was stripped of its slates and the brick walls had been pierced in several places. One wing had fallen in and burned. Through the gaping porch, in the light of the fires and of lanterns held in the hands of nuns, he saw that the floors were covered with bandaged and bloody men, all frightened and crying out.

Choking, Roger dived into the smoke that filled the street. But the little gray house of the seamstress was gone; all that huddle of wooden homes was gone, and there remained nothing but shallow cellars filled with hot ashes that glowed like molten metal and the gaunt chimneys tottering like drunken witnesses.

ROGER turned away shaking and sick. He shouted Mary's name insanely down the smoke-roofed tunnel of the Rue Dauphine. As if in answer a bombshell fell thirty steps before him, the iron *carcasse* striking sparks from the cobbles; it lay in the middle of the street in the red glow of a blazing shop, a black globe as big as a football with a short tow smoking in the fuse-hole.

He walked straight toward it, as if it did not matter, as if nothing mattered any more. The thing exploded with an ear-splitting clap. There was a whizzing past his head, a sharp *ting* of iron on stone about his feet. He was unhurt. The lower half of the *carcasse* lay smoking faintly and as he stepped over it there was a reek of burnt powder and scorched iron.

"*Hola!*" said a voice from the earth.

He looked to the left and saw a bearded blond face staring at him from a cellar hatch. He demanded of it, "Where is the Norman woman, the seamstress who lived in the Rue d'Orléans?"

The beard addressed someone behind and below. "*Dieu!* The fellow walks amongst the bombs to get a button sewn!" To Roger the beard cried, "How should I know? Dead, one supposes. But many hide themselves in the casemates under the bastions. Try the Bastion du Roi."

Rodrigues—Rodrigues would know!

"Where is the merchant, Rodrigues?"

"Ha!" said the beard, and spat into the street. "Rodrigues! That sou-pinching devil is dead, *mon vieux*, dead and burned in his own hell. The siege had sent him mad, like others—like you, one supposes. He saw his ships sunk at the Quai and his tobacco scattered to the codfish, and when that great warehouse burned with everything he owned, the people could not hold him back. There was gold inside, he said, and rushed into the flames. All Basques are mad, of course. Are you a Basque?"

Behind the beard, in the pallid light of a candle stuck in a bottle, Roger could see the heads of half a dozen men, fishermen and soldiers, merrily looting a wine-cellar.

He turned away and followed the Rue d'Orléans toward the Place d'Armes. At the corner of the Rue de l'Estang he looked up the slope and saw the big square of wooden barracks built by the New Englanders after the siege of '45, all blazing furiously at the rear of the Bastion de la Reine.

As he emerged into the Place d'Armes, all hell seemed to spring up before him. The residency was burning, throwing a red glow over the wreck of the Bastion du Roi—the long stone foundations and tumbled brick and slate which represented the once fine barracks and chapel, the charred wooden barricades erected to protect the casemate doors from bomb blasts, the breached and crumbling ramparts where even now, like demons about the Pit, Drucour's gunners were struggling to reply to the British fire.

The shells came in irregular bursts as if a tree of explosive fruit were being shaken by an infuriated but fitful giant. Roger waited for such a shower, and while the battered houses facing the Place d'Armes still rang with concussions, and with the dust still flying, he darted across the square.

The small guardhouse before the inner moat was in a curious state: a bomb had fallen through the roof and blown the east wall clean out, leaving the others intact and scattering slates all over the walk. In this three-sided box, like a puppet-show, crouched a corporal's guard with faces pale and haggard behind the fierce mustaches, lighted by the flaming residency.

One cried at him, "*Hola!*" Then, seeing that Roger's clothes were *gentil* if sadly bedraggled, he added with more respect, "*M'sieu* wishes?"

"*Mademoiselle*, the sister of Captain Johnstone. I must see her at once!"

The soldier hesitated. What ragamuffins they looked! And these were of the Cambis, the smartest regiment in Louisburg, out from France just in time for the siege!

The corporal spoke. "She is in Casemate Four, *m'sieu*. Perhaps Five, but try Four first."

Roger nodded and ran on. The dry moat which made a separate fortress of the Bastion du Roi was now choked with debris from the burned-out barracks. The drawbridge was gone, burned and fallen, and in the little brick cave which housed the machinery he could see the forms of two soldiers, shattered and bloody, their dirty white uniforms smoking in the heat of the embers. Roger swung along the front of the hot wreck of the *casernes* to a narrow passage between the moat end and the inner bastion wall. Here another sentry halted him, black-mustached like the others and with the same smudged waxen face.

"Mademoiselle Johnstone—Casemate Four," Roger cried. The sentry stood aside.

Casemate Four opened its heavy door cautiously at his urgent knocking, and a gust of foul air, many times breathed and laden with unwashed human smells flowed past him. As the door closed at his back, through the stout oak came the cry of *"Garde la bombe!"* and the rattle and scurry of the Cambis flinging down their buckets and running to cover.

Roger was in a long low chamber with floor and walls of native stone, and a wooden ceiling which creaked and thumped with the movement of feet overhead. The place was lit by half a dozen guard-lanterns in each of which a thick stub of tallow candle burned with a tremulous blue-yellow flame in the exhausted air.

There were, at a guess, one hundred and fifty men, women and children standing, sitting, leaning against the walls. They had the faces of ghosts, with tight mouths and shadowed eyes that stared straight before them at nothing. A few heads turned at his entry and looked away again listlessly.

He hesitated to speak in this catacomb. His eyes roved from one to another, from side to side, all the way down the chamber. She was not there. Casemate Five, then! But as he turned he saw her almost at his feet, sitting against the wall with a ragged child in her lap and a fisherwoman asleep against her shoulder. She was dressed in something of a light gray, with a Barcelona handkerchief drooping a yellow fold across her breast. Her head was bare and the chestnut hair made a red-gold aureola in the lantern light from above. She was asleep or near it; her eyelids drooped, her cheeks, always a little gaunt in a healthy Highland fashion, seemed hollow now and there were violet shadows beneath the eyes. Her lips had that mysterious suggestion of a smile which one sees on babies and sleeping girls and sometimes on the dead.

He was startled seeing not Mary Foy but his fanciful Golden Woman made human by some alchemy that had to do with himself It was as if he had looked upon her through a warped glass all this time and now in this gloomy place beheld her as she was. All his yearnings, all his journeys had brought him infallibly to this place and to this moment. And there was nothing new or strange about it, for surely this was the revelation that must come to all young fools who seek the riches of the world—to find them in a living, breathing woman after all. Eternal quest, eternal answer—and eternal fools!

"Roger," she said in a drugged whisper. "It's really you?" She came awake, wide-eyed and alarmed. "But how? Why? *O mo chridhe*, why have you come back here?"

"Is there a place where we can talk?" he asked in a low voice.

Her gaze went to a narrow flight of wooden steps against the farther wall. The fisherwoman lifted her head. "I will take the child now, *ma'mselle*."

He followed Mary up the stairs and passed into the second story of the casemate, a powder loft in other times, cleared out now for a number of wounded lying on the bare boards.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"GUS A' CRIOCH!"

MARY picked her way toward a partition and a door. She knocked and with Roger entered a tiny *cabinet* lit by a single candle on a table where an officer sat writing. He was an elegant man, nearing forty, wearing the white coat and blue facings of the Regiment Royal de la Marine with the flaming ribbon of the Order of St. Louis. The coat was unbuttoned in the stuffy air, the wide skirts drooping to the floor, and it exposed the blue waistcoat of the regiment and a frilled shirt. There was a foam of fine Valenciennes at the throat and wrists. He wore a periwig, well-powdered, and his long face and nervous hands made one hue with the wig; plainly an officer whose duties had kept him from the rough and tumble of the siege.

He looked up and met Roger's eyes. Mary said, "Roger, this is my brother, Captain Johnstone."

"And a chevalier of St. Louis!" Roger said lightly, addressing him. "It used to be plain Jamie Johnstone of Moffat, didn't it?"

The chevalier stood up and said in French, "Name of a name! Is this he—the one you love?"

All the man's hatred of England was in that choice of tongues, and in his face.

"Yes, James."

"So! This—this *faquin* has returned to the scene of his crime! He must wish to hang! What are you doing here with this traitor, this coward?"

Roger regarded them. James was ten years older than his sister, but the resemblance was distinct except about the mouth. The mouth of

this precious brother was weak—weak and self-satisfied, self-seeking, self-willed, a prejudiced and bitter mouth where hers was strong and generous.

"James!" she begged.

"Why 'coward'?" Roger demanded coldly.

"You ask that! You who raised the *sauve qui peut* at Coromandière—worse perhaps! What was it De Gannes tried to tell us before he died?"

"Jamie!" Mary pleaded. "Pray don't quarrel. It's all so terrible, and—oh, my God, how I wish I'd never seen either of you! To be torn like this!"

"What is it that you want?" James asked from his full height.

"I want you to take Roger with you—tonight!" She turned to the *faquin* impetuously. "Jamie's leaving for Quebec tonight, Roger. You must go and ask no questions. They would hang you in this place!"

Roger cocked an ironical brow at the chevalier. *"Sauve qui peut?"*

Johnstone snorted, *"Mordieu!* Why should I stay to be taken by the regiments of Lee and Warburton and Lascelles who were all at Prestonpans in '45? What would they not give to lay their hands on me?"

"You flatter yourself, Chevalier! What could they remember? They never saw aught of Jamie Johnstone but his back."

The chevalier looked his hate for that and put a hand to his sword-hilt.

Mary stepped between them. Her green gaze roved from one to the other.

"What does it mean, all this *jacasserie?"* she demanded imperiously.

Roger did not take his eyes from Johnstone's face. "Suppose you explain, my bonnie chevalier! I think your sister is entitled to know why she was sent to Halifax as the wife or mistress of that drunkard Foy—"

"What the devil do you mean? John Foy is our uncle—Mary's guardian. What! Is it possible you hadn't guessed that, *monsieur*—you who know so much?"

Roger turned to her, seeing light on many things, and with a singing in his heart. She flushed and put up a hand in an odd little gesture. He shrugged and said to her in English, with his hard gaze on her brother's face, "Then let me tell you why you came to Halifax, my dear. Jamie wanted advancement at Louisburg; he was hungry for appointments. He wrote you of his austere life, his meager pay, the reasons you couldn't come to Louisburg. He didn't mention that he had a mistress here, the charming *patronne* of the True Cuckoo in the Rue du Quai, whose husband—conveniently absent—was the chief French spy at New York. Who was herself a very useful person to the secret service of France! Well, that service wished an agent in the new settlement the English were contemplating in America. *Voila!* Mr. and Mrs. Foy! Later *la patronne* sent a reinforcement, a prisoner ransomed from the Indians at Louisburg, a man of known Jacobite sympathies. Jamie never knew the fellow's name—till now. A small world, isn't it?"

Mary cried, "Is this true? Why didn't you tell me, Jamie?"

JOHNSTONE did not answer. He stood erect, all contempt and outraged dignity—all but the lower lip. The lip moved petulantly.

"Why don't you tell her now, Jamie? You couldn't lie to her, could you—*chevalier sans peur et sans reproche?* Tell her everything, Jamie, and I'll bear you witness. Tell her about Culloden. Or would you like to go back to the start, when you were aide to Lord George Murray, but found it too fatiguing? And how you were posted with a platoon of my Manchester lads to guard the artillery—but found the nights too cold and the rain too wet?

"Tell her about Carlisle, where Prince Charlie left us to guard his retreat, and how the Duke of Perth commanded you to stay with your company—and how you decamped from Carlisle like a thief in the night! And Culloden, where you were posted on the left, and fled at the first English volley—remember?

"You didn't stop long at Ruthven where the Highland army tried to regather, did you, Jamie boy? You kept on to Killihuntly, and thence to Edinburgh, and finally to London where the English would never think of looking for you. London was dull, so you took a mistress—what was her name, Peggy?—and one morning as she lay in bed you peeped from your lodging window and saw the Manchester officers being taken to the scaffold on Kensington Common. Did your conscience trouble you for a moment then, my chevalier? I wonder! But that alarmed you. You must get out of England. So you wrote to Mary—sixteen, wasn't she?—and full of a romantic zeal for the cause, and for her gallant brother in peril. She took passage to Holland with Lady Jean Douglas, and you—you went in livery as her servant.

"Ah, but Paris was gay, wasn't it, after all your trials and sacrifices? You had a fine time there on Mary's money and your own, till all was gone. The gallant and romantic *Capitaine Johnstone, écossais et gentilhomme*—that was how you loved to describe yourself in your expansive moments, I recall. All Paris heard of you in those days, but one never heard of the little sister. I never guessed until that poor young fool De Gannes said something in the camp at Coromandière. Ah, well, all that—past now . . ."

Mary had drawn herself away from them both. Her face was tragic. "All this is true, Jamie? You don't deny it—any of it?"

He did not answer.

She drew in a great breath and cried indignantly, "Then it's all a lie—all I've believed in, all this time? It's been worthless, all the scheming and the lying—all for something false like you, yourself!"

"My dear girl," he said in the Parisian accent he liked to flaunt before colonial officers of the Marine, and in a tone of irascible virtue, "am I to blame if you chose to be romantic? You pursued me with letters, with entreaties. You professed your sisterly affection, your faith in the Chevalier Charles, your hatred of all things English. You wished to follow me to Acadie." He shrugged in a fashion exquisitely Gallic. "*Bien!* The service demanded an agent with the English expedition, and there you were, who spoke English so well, and there was Uncle John to be your guide and your protector. You must confess that things were well arranged. Your task was surely not unpleasant. You lived richly—when one recalls the lodging in Paris—and you seem to have found time to fall in love. *Eh, bien,*" he said sardonically, "I leave you to each other—till death do you part."

HE TURNED to the rough pine-wood table, stuffing papers into a leather satchel with an odd air of washing his hands. They watched him in silence.

"My *folie,*" he observed, waving some of the papers. "The story of my life, some day to be published in Paris—if one reaches Paris, which God grant!"

There was a respectful sound at the door, something between a scratch and a knock. It opened and there appeared one of the town militia, a small round man in homespun and a fisherman's striped nightcap and sabots, with a *bandoulière* in which a dozen paper cartridges were stuck, and carrying a rusty gun.

"The canoe waits at the Quai, *mon capitaine.*"

"*Allons!*" cried Johnstone gaily. He clapped a white-laced black tricorne on his wig, buttoned his coat, took up the satchel, bowed ironically to his sister and to Roger, and departed with the high-nosed haste of an actor making the best possible departure from a bad scene.

"Jamie!" she whispered. The closed door mocked her. In the meager candlelight her eyes were glittering with unshed tears. Her mouth quivered, her air of ardent purpose was gone; she had the naive look of a lost child. "He didn't deny it, Roger. It was true, all of it?"

"He seems sure of a place in history, nevertheless, my dear." Roger moved toward her eagerly, but she shrank away.

"No! No, Roger! Why did you come back?"

"Because I love you."

"That's not true, Roger. You never loved anyone but yourselves—you and Jamie. You're alike, and you've crushed me between you. But now it's over. I won't be hurt any more. I see you very clearly now. Do you think I don't know what De Gannes said? And now you've come back on some new deviltry that has to do with money, position, influence—the things you really want. And you'll get those things, Roger, without me. There are two things that wretched little stone talisman can't give you—and I'm one."

"And the other?"

"Honor."

"I see," he said painfully. There was nothing more to say. Honor! All this passionate pilgrimage of hers had been made in the light of it—honor, loyalty, faith in the one cause. And she felt herself betrayed.

The door opened. Loppinot stalked in, his white uniform smudged and torn. His convivial face was putty-colored with fatigue, his eyes were pouched, his veteran mustaches wild. Behind him paused a corporal of the Bourgogne with bayonet fixed. The town-major clicked his heels.

"*Ma'mselle!*" And to Roger, harshly, "Monsieur Sudden, I place you under arrest for espionage and treason, on information laid by Captain Johnstone."

"He is gone. How can he testify?"

"He left a deposition and there are witnesses—from Coromandière, *monsieur.*"

"The trial?"

"Summary."

"The punishment?"

"Death, what else?"

Mary uttered a small sound, of astonishment, of distress; it was hard to say. The three men ignored her.

"In a summary case," Roger said quietly, "you will wish to save time, Loppinot. I am prepared to make a full confession."

The town-major lifted his gray brows. "Here?"

"And now."

"*Dieu!* But—*ma'mselle?*"

"I beg *mademoiselle* to hear what I have to say. It will explain, perhaps, some things she does not understand."

"*Ma'mselle?*"

"I wish to stay," she said in a breaking voice.

"*Bien!* With the sister of Monsieur Johnstone for witness—but we should have another, should we not?" He called in the corporal.

There was a little silence in which all their breathing could be heard. Then the walls shook in another bomb blast.

"Begin!" said Loppinot through his teeth. A mist of lime-dust filled the chamber and made a halo about the candle.

Roger wondered how to begin. "I, Roger Sudden, being of sound mind . . ." as one did in making a will? He cleared his throat and gazed at Mary as if she were the only person in the room.

"My name is Roger Sudden. I am an Englishman from Suddenholt in the county of Kent. When the Chevalier Charles Stuart raised his

standard in Scotland I left the university to fight for him. In the campaign which followed I commanded a company of the Manchester Regiment. The result of that affair you know. I made my way to France and remained in exile until '49. In that year I returned secretly to Kent. There I found the Jacobite cause hopeless. I left for the colonies, a man without king or country, determined to make my fortune abroad. I came to Halifax and within a few months was carried off by Indians. I roamed the forest with them nearly five years,

"Then I heard De Gannes," Roger explained. "He aimed a pistol at me as I ran at him. The ball struck me on the chest and shattered the little Indian amulet."

living like a beast of the forest. In the year 1754 the savages sold me to the French, as Monsieur Loppinot remembers, and after a winter's imprisonment at Louisburg I was given my release with certain instructions from Monsieur Rodrigues.

"In Halifax I followed these instructions to the house of one Monsieur Foy. He lent me money and I entered the Indian trade. I was enabled to go anywhere amongst the savages by reason of a small stone talisman which they —and I—held in great respect. It gave me the touch of Midas. In three years I had a fortune, gathered from French, Indians and English alike. I knew Monsieur Foy was an agent of France. I did not care. I remind you that I was a man without king or country. And I loved a lady in the household of Monsieur Foy."

HERE Loppinot flicked a curious glance at Mary. Roger's voice continued.

"In the autumn of '57 Monsieur Foy was discovered, and he and the lady fled to Louisburg. I intended to follow. I had transferred the greater part of my fortune there in the belief that France must win this struggle in Nova Scotia and that Halifax was doomed. I lingered to wind up my affairs. When all was ready I was aware of a strong *malaise*. At the final moment I did not want to go. But matters were decided for me by an interview with Monsieur Wolfe, the English general, who placed me under arrest. I escaped to Louisburg and rejoined the lady and my fortune. I was not used to idleness. I wished for something to do. Monsieur Rodrigues procured for me a post as interpreter with Colonel St. Julhien at Coromandière."

Again the shock of explosions on the bastion, again the candle-flutter and the mist of lime.

"All this"—Roger licked the dust from his lips—"does not matter very much, I suppose. What follows is important. When the English approached Coromandière in their boats, I left the camp to watch events—simply as an observer. I ask you to believe that. Yet when I saw them plunge into the trap, I was deeply moved. Amongst their rangers were many old friends, men who had fought and labored faithfully for me in Acadie. And there were Scots, wearing the dress which I must always associate with my own struggles in the cause of the Chevalier Charles. Finally there were the English grenadiers, some of them close inshore, perishing under that rain of bullets." He paused. "Do you know the device the English grenadiers wear in their caps?"

She said, bitterly, "Yes—the white horse of Hanover!"

"Ah! But the white horse is the ancient symbol of my home as well—the land of Kent, which lies so terribly near the coast of France. I make no excuse, you understand. I offer no defense. I tell you simply there must come a time when the soil of his birthplace means more to a man than all the world. I ask you to believe that my love, my fortune, all my new hopes and old struggles were forgotten then. I ask you to believe that Coromandière—Louisburg—all New France in that moment ceased to exist for me. It was Kent I saw, and the men of Kent in arms to defend her—and I on the wrong side of the Channel!"

"Fantastic!" Loppinot growled. Mary regarded them both with haunted eyes.

"You understand," Roger went on, "that when one puts an impression into words the thing seems cold and clear. It was not like that. It was like a dream. I found myself running down the butte at the end of the beach. There were a few English boats offshore, edging away from the fusillade. I beckoned them in. There was a space amongst the rocks, enough for two boats abreast. They came. Then I heard young De Gannes. He aimed a pistol at me as I ran at him. The ball struck me on the breast and shattered the little Indian amulet. Otherwise I should have perished at a stroke. I closed with him as he drew his sword, and beat his head in with his own pistol. It was his life or mine.

"My chest seemed broken. It was agony to breathe. I made my way to the camp and raised the cry of *sauve qui peut*. I make no excuse for that, either. I knew what would happen. I knew the poison of that cry to troops shaken by a surprise. I cannot remember all that followed. Two Indian women dragged me away into the forest. Once I looked back and saw the French break and run. After that was darkness. I lay six weeks in a camp of savages beside the Miré waters, with a bruise on my chest as large as a spread hand. . . Shall I go on, *monsieur?*"

"I think you have said enough," responded the town-major grimly, but his black eyes had a sudden new interest. "These savages at Miré—what are they doing?"

"They have had enough of war. They have withdrawn with Père Maillard to make their peace with the English."

"Maillard . . . *paillard!* And Boishebert and his force?"

"Somewhere toward the Montagne du Diable—without food or ammunition."

"Ah, but supplies await him in the forest not far from here, my friend!"

"If you mean the cache at Miré, the savages have emptied it on their way toward the old hunting grounds. I told them where it was."

Roger watched the veteran's face as he broke this news, expecting an outburst of Gallic anger, a little dance of rage.

Loppinot's mouth sagged. He resembled an idiot. All the fatigues of the siege seemed to descend on him at once. He leaned against the doorpost with eyes closed. His lips writhed beneath the gray mustaches. He said in a flat voice without opening his eyes, "My God, we have held out for weeks awaiting his attack. We have made sorties at great cost, hoping to strike a moment when he might be near." He opened his eyes very wide. "You lie! It is impossible!"

Roger shrugged. "You smuggle the chevalier Johnstone out of the fortress tonight?"

Loppinot could not conceal the contempt in his voice. "He goes to Quebec, to seek an appointment with Monsieur Montcalm, you comprehend."

"*Bien!* The woodsmen who go with him—tell them to examine the *cache* at Miré and send back word. It is not far. I came from there since noon today. I tell you they will find no Indians and no supplies. Neither will Boishebert."

"And the savage chief, Jean-Baptiste Koap?"

"Dead."

The town-major stared. He straightened himself abruptly. "You will remain here, *monsieur*, for the time. I shall place a guard. *Mademoiselle!*" He turned to her with a frosty politeness and gestured toward the door.

She came to Roger in a rush of skirts, her arms about his neck, her mouth to his, her slim body pressed against him as if to let her whole self speak an emotion for which she could find no words. Tears crept from her closed eyes and streaked her dusty cheeks. Roger put up a hand and stroked the bright hair. Red-gold. Golden Woman. What a pity, to find her and to lose himself. Suddenly she broke into ungoverned weeping.

He was calm, even detached, marveling at the fecklessness of life, which wasted so much passion, so much hope and struggle for no end.

"Mademoiselle!" Loppinot repeated. She shuddered and drew herself a little apart from Roger, the green eyes searching his face as if they sought in every feature some memory for a lonely age to come. Her lips moved and, as always when she was stirred, the words came in Gaelic.

"Kiss me, dear of my heart. 'Tis an ill turn to the long road but you I shall be loving to the end."

"Gus a' chrioch," he repeated gently, putting his lips to hers. "To the end!"

She straightened herself then and with a high chin walked past Loppinot and the sentry as an empress might sweep past a pair of gaping lackeys on the palace steps.

THE door was closed, the sentry stood outside. The candle flickered out and left Roger in darkness with a dismal feeling of suffocation. What hour was it? There could not be much left of the night.

The bombardment slackened as if the British gunners had wearied at last. Out of ammunition, probably. The surviving French cannon continued to fire on those efforts in the dark, but they had a fitful sound, like minute guns at a funeral.

A military footstep came at last, and he stood up in the dark and braced himself for the thing it meant. A lantern dazzled him as the door opened. When his eyes recovered he saw an orderly with a plate and a carafe. Behind stood Captain Fagonde of the Artois.

"Monsieur!" Fagonde made a stiff little bow. "Here is something to break your fast. One regrets the biscuit and the poverty of the wine, but you comprehend our difficulties."

Roger murmured thanks. He did not move. The orderly placed the lantern on the table beside the provisions and withdrew.

"You wish a priest?"

"No."

"I have been sent, in the custom, to bear you company until it is time for you to leave."

"Again my thanks. Pray seat yourself." Roger pushed forward the one chair.

"One prefers to stand."

An awkward silence.

"It is to be hanging, one supposes?" Roger murmured.

"That is prescribed for spies," returned Fagonde in a chilly voice. "Unfortunately, Gallows Hill is in the hands of the English, who use it for an observation post; and affairs within the town are not convenient. You are to be shot, in the moat outside the Bastion Maurepas—the only part of the defenses not under direct fire from the English batteries."

"I see. May one ask why you were chosen for this embarrassment?"

"The firing platoon is to be drawn from the Regiment Artois—for reasons you can guess, *monsieur*."

"Ah!" A pause. "May one ask . . . when?"

Fagonde shrugged. "Not today, certainly. Tomorrow morning, I think."

"In that case, you had better take the chair for a time. I propose that we take turns sitting down. Come, relax yourself, Fagonde! After all, what is a little matter of death between friends?"

Distaste played over the officer's handsome face. "Monsieur Sudden, we have made merry together at the house of Rodrigues and in the camp. You are a brave man—else you would have stayed in safety with your English friends. One respects these things. But do not call me friend, I beg of you."

It was Roger's turn to shrug.

They talked of other things—of Paris, of Italy, of summer in the Medoc where Fagonde came from, and its vineyards and its wines, of which he spoke with enthusiasm. Gradually the man unbent. After two hours he sent the sentry for a stool and a pack of battered cards, and they flicked away the minutes and hours with piquet. The delicacy which did not permit Fagonde to consult the watch that ticked in his pocket forbade Roger to ask the hour. In the candle-lit *cabinet* there was no day or night. Roger had an odd feeling that already he was launched upon eternity.

The close of the long day was marked by the appearance of another orderly with the evening meal: cold boiled herrings, biscuit and wine—this time in a flagon. The man also laid on the table some spare candles for the lantern.

They had run out of small talk by then. "Pardon," murmured Roger and lay on the floor against the wall. He closed his eyes and summoned the image of Mary, going over that last brief interview, her looks, her movements, the somber passion in her face, the haunting music of the Gaelic on her tongue. All that beauty, all that flaming spirit given up to sadness—what a waste! His cynic's

philosophy shielded him against self-pity, but his soul protested against the world for the waste of Mary Johnstone. After a time he slept, uneasily.

At intervals the casemate shook. Fagonde sat slumped on his stool, elbows on knees, regarding his prisoner gloomily. Once he took the watch from his fob and wound it carefully with a silver key. Later he placed the stool in a corner and sat back to doze.

The bombardment died away again. From the ramparts not a gun spoke. The dead silence awakened them both. They looked at each other across the little chamber but did not move or speak. Without warning the stillness was shattered in the direction of the harbor. An unusual uproar this, a cheering of several hundred voices and a ragged but furious splutter of small arms. Fagonde sprang up, oversetting the stool, staring at the door as if he could see through it and the night beyond. Roger leaped to his feet also. A British assault by water? Wolfe? Wolfe, sick of delays and resolved to end the siege in a stroke?

Captain Fagonde dashed outside, giving Roger a glimpse of a startled guard and the strained attitudes of the wounded, raised on their elbows and staring toward the north wall. The sentry kicked the door shut.

The uproar died away as swiftly as it began. There was utter silence for perhaps ten minutes. Then gunfire, heavy and continuous, from La Grève battery or perhaps the anchored three-deckers, or all together. The attack had failed, then! La Grève and the ships could sweep the whole waterfront with a storm of grape. With his memories of Coromandière, Roger was filled with ghastly fancies. The cannonade went on for an hour. Then silence.

Fagonde returned, raging. "That pig Des Gouttes!"

"What has happened?"

Fagonde laughed hysterically. "You seem to have had a hand in two of our disasters, *monsieur*. Is it possible you do not know of this? Monsieur Boscawen cannot bring his ships into the harbor to engage Des Gouttes—not while the Island Battery holds—so tonight he sends in five hundred armed seamen in boats, with oars muffled! One learns from a straggler, who fell out of his boat and swam to the beach, that the English had guidance from a smuggler, one Capitaine 'Uxley, who seems to have known how to bring boats in to the anchorage without awakening the island. *Dieu!* They might have stormed the town, had they known all things. The gunners at La Grève were some of those good-for-nothing seamen of Des Gouttes—asleep, without even a linstock lit and ready! But the English came, it seems, to capture our last ships of war—under the very guns of La Grève! They were swarming aboard before the anchor watches could lift a finger, and they cut the cables and hoisted the sails and set their boats towing, to get the ships away. *Prudent* went aground as soon as her moorings were cut, so they set fire to her. She is a torch at this moment, close against the parapet of La Grève. *Bienfaisant* is taken—they sailed her away audaciously—and La Grève could do nothing but shoot a few holes in her canvas!"

"But Boscawen cannot take her out past the island!"

"Why should he? His seamen have sailed her up into the northeast harbor. There they will put powder and shot aboard, and tomorrow we may expect a bombardment from her guns—our own guns, *pardieu!*" He sank on the stool muttering something about *sacré comble de nos maux* and the extreme filth of that pig, Des Gouttes.

As if the boats and their prize had signaled themselves clear, the British siege guns opened fire once more.

A stir outside. The door opened and there appeared a young officer with a girlish face—Charnier of the Artois, "La Pucelle" of the mess-table. He looked unhappy but his glance toward Roger was quick and cold.

"Daylight in an hour, *mon capitaine.* Here are the barber and the hairdresser."

In they came, a dark stout man in the white breeches and red waistcoat of the Artois, bearing razor, soap, bowl and towel, and a dark thin man in black broadcloth rather the worse for wear, carrying comb, brush and scissors in one hand hand and a powder box in the other. Roger bowed to the officers ironically and Fagonde said seriously, "One wishes to look one's best at such a time, *monsieur.*"

When all was done, Roger thanked them gracefully, regretting the emptiness of his pockets, and they murmured politely and departed.

CHARNIER said in a strained voice, "One has a message for you, *monsieur,* to be given at the last moment." He passed a small billet which Roger opened slowly, lest his fingers shake. All it said was.

gus a' chrioch
Mairi

The ink and pen of Captain Johnstone were still lying on the table. He stepped to it, smoothed the note carefully and wrote on the back of it.

For value received I hereby sell and assign unto Mary Johnstone all my right and title in the snow *Fair Lady,* Job Huxley master, now lying at the port of Halifax in His Majesty's province of Nova Scotia. And I earnestly entreat the said Mary Johnstone to avail herself of this opportunity to return to Scotland and there dis-

pose of the said snow unto the said Job Huxley at a price to be agreed between them, their agents or assigns.

Roger Sudden

He folded it and passed the billet back to Charnier. "For *Mademoiselle,* after . . . you understand?"

Charnier took it, watching his face, and burst out, "How you are cold, you English! To be loved like that, by such a woman, and to receive it with a face of stone!"

"What the devil do you mean?" rapped out Fagonde.

La Pucelle glanced at him, and back to Roger. "Is it possible? Do you realize how *Mademoiselle* has struggled for your life all these hours, without food or rest?"

Roger was silent. Fagonde said, "*Mademoiselle* was tranquil when she left here—the face high, the mouth firm. She seemed to accept what was inevitable."

"To deceive him!" Charnier cried. His girlish features twisted tragically. "How little you know of women, Fagonde! She went straight to the governor . . . I was there. She burst upon us in a superb anger. 'Men and their silly games! Their pompous rules! Their cruel penalties!' Monsieur Drucour was gentle, but firm, always firm. She fell on her knees and pleaded with him in a voice to melt a heart of ice. He was firm. She went away. She returned with Madame Drucour. They pleaded together. He was firm. She went out into the bombardment and all through yesterday she searched out the members of the Conseil Supérieur one by one, casemate by casemate, bastion by bastion, begging them to intercede. Always the answer was no. I went with her, you understand, because I have a heart, and my heart wept tears for her as she wept tears for Monsieur Sudden.

"Tonight she returned to the governor, like a tigress, demanding a formal trial. Monsieur Drucour replied that the prisoner's confession had made a trial needless. Where were the depositions? she demanded. There was none except the charge of Captain Johnstone and his recommendation for execution. 'No written confession! No signature anywhere! No sworn witnesses!' she cried. 'The whole affair a crime in the eyes of justice, a dishonor to the name of France!' Ah, but she was magnificent! Magnificent! But Monsieur Drucour—" the slender shoulders of La Pucelle lifted and drooped disconsolately—" is not to be moved, you understand."

"Where is she now?" Roger asked painfully.

"She has gone to the Commissaire-Ordonnateur to beg his influence in one last plea for your life. You know Monsieur Prevost—a will of brass. Alas, how women never understand these things! They must always beat their wings against the bars."

Captain Fagonde pulled out his timepiece. "*Messieurs*—" harshly—"it is the time. *En avant!*"

CHAPTER XXIX

INVICTA!

THERE was little dignity about the march to death. With Charnier and Fagonde, he stumbled down the narrow stairs of the loft.

Along the smoking Rue d'Orléans it proved impossible to keep step, even to keep ranks, for the thoroughfare was heaped with debris, much of it hot, and forced them to dash past in Indian file. The platoon debouched at last into the space before the eastern ramparts where the Maurepas Gate reared its imposing pile of Caen stone, the back door of the town.

Seeing the gold lace at the platoon's head, the gate sentinels turned out the guard, a sleepy lot with bits of foul straw clinging to their uniforms. The massive gate swung open with ponderous groans and the guard, a beggar's dozen of the Bourgogne, presented arms and stared as the party went by.

Charnier led the way, turning off to the left along the covered-way for a few steps and then down the counterscarp into the moat. It was dry, or rather boggy, like most of the Louisburg moat except where the engineers had contrived to link one or two of the original swamp pools in the scheme of defense.

Fagonde ordered the men to pull down a wide gap in the crazy palisade, explaining to Roger in an apologetic voice, "It is necessary for the soldiers to stand back to the counterscarp, *monsieur,* lest the sun get in their eyes."

Roger nodded and walked across the moat through a blue and green mass of wild flag in blossom, trampling these trans-Atlantic fleurs-de-lis underfoot as distant Mr. Pitt intended to trample the white.

At the scarp he halted and faced about. The moat was lined with black stone quarried at Cap Noir. He had worked with the prison gang repairing this very place. The stones had tumbled again in several places with the action of frost and thaw, exposing the heart of earth carted laboriously from pits in the forest by all those thousands, all those years ago. What a poor sham after all, this Dunkirk of the West, this fortified swamp whose walls collapsed of their own accord! He recalled whimsically his first impressions: the broad encircling ramparts, the wooden town compact and gray with weather like some old stone town in France, the bristle of cannon, the ships, the tramp of battalions which filled the twenty-foot streets wih a river of steel. Strength, strength—all blown away now.

Sic transit . . . Well, it was something to have had a hand in that. He could pretend that his life had held a purpose after all. Certainly no one else could have done it. And there was a fitting irony in the thought that few would know and none would remember what turned the scale at Coromandière or why Boishebert failed to strike his blow. History, which had so many puzzles to ponder, could well afford two more.

Why were they waiting? There was good light now. There had been a careful charging of *fusils* under the sergeant's eye and the platoon had ported arms for Fagonde's inspection. He had criticised the priming of two or three, and one man was obliged to change his flint. Then at a command the party had grounded arms and stood at ease, leaning on their musket muzzles and staring across the moat at the figure against the scarp. From the embrasures of the Bastion Maurepas a number of curious faces peered. Fagonde rebuked them sharply and the faces disappeared. He came to Roger slowly.

"You wish the eyes covered, *monsieur?*"

"No."

"We wait for Loppinot. The thing must be done in the presence of the town-major, you understand."

"I understand."

FAGONDE went on dropping words nervously into the silence. Roger gave him a polite attention, but his mind was far away. The air of morning had never seemed so full of the stuff of life. It came from the east, from the Big Water, from England perhaps, who could say? From Rochefort Point it carried a smell of wet wild grass, of moss and bog pools mingled with a smell of sea, like Romney Marsh in a wind off the Channel. Romney . . . did the luggermen still trundle ankers of Nantz up that dark and lonely beach? Romney and the Weald . . . and that handsome ruin in the beeches, Suddenholt! Did Charles and the Fiat Club still gather to drink to the king over the water? Assuredly, if Charles had any standing whatsoever with a wine-merchant. Parson Balleter . . . Barcombe Tarver . . . Sir Miles Boyce . . . Cousin Penny, poor thing . . . all of them unreal now.

The emigrants of Tooley Street . . a myth, a lost tribe camped in a desert of shadows like those green bones left by D'Anville on the Basin shore. Gautier . . . Luksi . . . Wapke . . . Foy . . . Mauger . . . Le Loutre . . . ghosts! An echo of voices in an emptiness. Good God, were they all phantoms—Fagonde? Charnier? The lounging soldiers in their draggled white coats? Mary? Ah, Mary was real, she had been real always, even when she seemed most mysterious and aloof. He knew that now and was sorry, thinking how simple *this* would have been if she had remained a shadow with the rest. The pattern of his life had made a cynical little comedy whose every act led on to some such end as this. The reality of Mary Johnstone marred the perfection of it and his sense of fatality was disturbed.

The sun climbed and put down a hot tongue to lick the dew from the grass in the moat. The air shifted with it and brought a pungent smell of the forest. Lovely there now. Bunchberry flowering underfoot, and starflower, and the brown seed-stems of the ferns flirting little clouds of dust about the tramping British legs. New seed-cones on the junipers, each small and tight and scarlet like a rosebud amongst the fine green needles.

Fagonde pulled forth his watch. "*Dieu!* Where is that man Loppinot! We have been hours here! What a misfortune! *Monsieur*, I ask God to witness that it is no fault of mine." He went over to Charnier, moodily stalking up and down amongst the green swords and blue banners of the iris.

A curious face peered over the glacis crest. Fagonde barked. The head vanished. A conference in undertones with La Pucelle followed. Charnier set off toward the town at a run.

The bombardment thundered on. The sounds were muffled in the hollow of the moat. Gulls cried overhead, part of the white cloud which hovered and squabbled about the fish-slips in time of peace. Hungry now, poor devils; there had been no fishing in two months. Instead, this uproar and the fires and the hanging smoke. Strange how they stayed on. So, too, with the plover, rising in swift ordered flocks out of the moorland, dipping, lifting, settling again, as if resolved that all these man-made nuisances soon must be gone forever and their ancient nesting ground at peace. And how right you are, thought Roger. Had they known all along, with their marvelous instinct? Certain it was that with its drains choked and its wooden mass gone up in smoke, Louisburg in a few years must revert to moorland as it had been in the beginning, only the tumbled walls remaining for a monument to colossal futility.

That old comparison of Halifax and Louisburg disturbed him like a voice, a question demanding an answer. Somewhere in the story of the two towns was concealed the secret of French failure in America. What was it? The French built better ships, trained better soldiers; they understood the art of fortification as no other nation did. They had made alliances with the savages from Nova Scotia to the Great Lakes and all down the muddy reaches of the Mississippi. The continent was theirs, the English a scatter of interlopers clinging to the coast. And their American empire functioned with a brain at Quebec and a strong sword-hand at Louisburg, while the English had no unity and no strong arm anywhere. Yet

what was Louisburg now, and what would Quebec be when another season passed? It was easy to say that a mighty English fleet and army had come across the sea, and charge it all to that. But was that all, a tussle of redcoats against white on the edge of a continent? They were too small in that immensity. There was something else, some other significance. What?

The sun stood at mid-morning when young Charnier returned. The guns had died away again and in the quiet his running feet rang loudly on the bridge. A sorry virgin now, hat in hand, powdered hair all sooty from the burning streets, girlish face gone sallow and outraged, a rash of perspiration on the fine curved upper lip. He stumbled down to them sobbing and out of breath.

"What the devil!" Fagonde snarled. "Where is Aide-Major Loppinot?"

"Monsieur Loppinot—will not be here this morning—any morning—any more. It is finished—lost—all lost!"

Fagonde's bold face was a study. "Idiot! Explain yourself!"

Charnier drew himself up stiffly. The Bastion Maurepas was alive with heads again.

"Monsieur Loppinot has gone out with D'Anthonay and Du Vivier to surrender the fortress to the English!" There was a sigh like an east wind from the firing party and from the parapet above.

"It is false!" shouted Fagonde.

"It is true, *mon capitaine*. At ten o'clock by the governor's order a flag was hoisted on the ruins of the Dauphin—our drummers beat a *chamade*—Monsieur Loppinot went out with a letter asking for terms. . ."

"And the terms?"

"Total surrender as prisoners of war!"

Fagonde gave back a pace as if Charnier were unclean. "Without honors? Name of a name! It's infamous! Monsieur Drucour cannot accept—" He turned to Roger furiously. "After the battle we French have fought, you English offer us the terms of dogs!"

Roger's voice was cold. "What terms did Montcalm grant our prisoners at Fort William Henry last year? He permitted his savages to slaughter them like dogs!"

Tears glittered in the blue eyes of La Pucelle. "At first Monsieur Drucour decided to fight on—but you know the state of the walls, the bastions, the town . . . The people gathered about Monsieur Drucour and his officers with tears and supplications—my God, it was terrible! And so he gave in . . . I saw the Regiment Cambis weeping with rage in the Place d'Armes, burning their colors, striking their muskets against the stones to break the stocks. Finished—all is finished!"

"All but one thing," said Fagonde harshly. His eyes were hot. "There must be one more whiff of powder, Charnier! . . . *Monsieur*, arrange yourself! Platoon!"

IT CAME to Roger then. This talk of walls. Walls! The French in America had surrounded themselves with walls and shut up their bodies and their minds. Only a handful of *coureurs de bois* and priests had ever penetrated the continent—and the *coureurs* had mated with savage women and spilled their seed in the wilderness, and the priests were wedded to God. They had not left a mark. He remembered a night at Beauséjour before its fall when that queer broken fellow, La Vérendrye, had talked about an ocean of grass beyond the sunset, a range of rocky mountains that touched the sky, and somewhere on the other side a great salt sea. Quebec had laughed at him and sent him to the little Acadian backwater where he could tell his droll tales and do no harm.

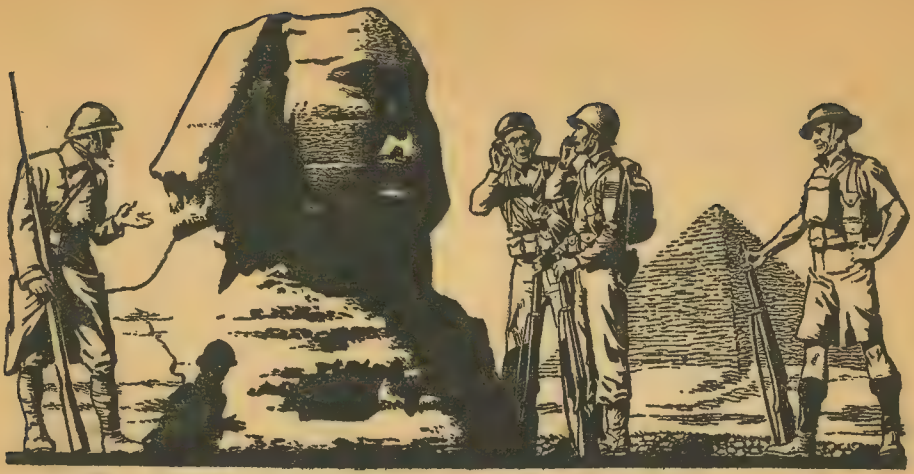
That was it! That was the difference and that was the secret. None of the English settlements had walls. Halifax had even let the first crude palisade go to rot. What seemed weakness was in fact strength, the spirit of men who would not be confined; ignorant, but ready to pay in blood for knowledge; ill fed, but seeing fields in the unbroken forest; grumbling and discontented, but driven out and beyond by that very itch in their English flesh for new earth to tread, new rivers to cross, new mountains to behold. By Jove, yes! The restless English who would have no walls about them, who demanded to see and to move beyond, to march across a horizon that was always somewhere ahead, toward the west; the English whose women went with them always and all ways, resolved not merely to penetrate the wilderness but to people it!

How long would it take? Only Munitoo could say. But now, with the dead hand of France thrown off, with the savages at peace, the march could mend its pace. Some day we shall tread those prairies of La Vérendrye and cross those mountains and behold the great west sea. And it came to him in a rush of exaltation that all this march across the northern wilderness had begun at Halifax that day in '49. Who could have foreseen it in that mob? Mob no longer, mob purged of all its dross, mob hammered and shaped steel-hard and steel-sharp for the work to come. The weak had died, the shiftless fled, there remained only the unconquerable. Unconquerable!

The word rang in his mind as Fagonde shouted his last command. He faced the muskets with a proud, unflinching gaze, and as the Artois pressed their triggers they were astonished to hear the Englishman cry out in a tongue unknown to them.

"Invicta! Invicta!"

The End



ASK ADVENTURE

Information you can't get elsewhere

A CRAFT for the "King" Strang country.

Query:—After the war I'm planning to get a place on one of the outlying islands of northern Lake Michigan's Beaver group, so must have transportation to and from St. James (on Big Beaver) and, occasionally, the mainland. I'd also like to do a little cruising through the surrounding waters.

Since I plan to operate from early May through late November, when possible, I shall need a safe, steady little craft with a minimum of quirks. She must be large enough to sleep two people, and to carry a couple more on short hauls. The easier she is to handle, the better, for though I put in a couple of seasons in freight on the Lakes a few years back, I've had practically no experience with small boats. My personal preference (subject to change, of course) is inclined toward sail with auxiliary, rather than straight power. Age, kind, and previous condition of servitude, are unimportant, providing she is in fairly good shape. As to cost: $500 maximum, and the cheaper the better.

Specific questions:

1. What type of boat do you recommend as best suited to my needs?
2. What is the most efficient way to procure such a craft?
3. How much is it likely to cost?

Any additional comments will be much appreciated.

—Sgt. Dwight V. Swain
Hq Btry, Hq AA Command,
Richmond 10, Virginia

Reply by A. R. Knauer:—Your limitation as to cost of $500.00 maximum immediately places a tremendous barrier for me to hurdle. The waters you speak about can really be nasty at times, and the price of boats at present is in many cases 200 or 300 percent greater than four or five years ago, that is of the older boats. Some people would consider a 20-footer large enough for two people. I have cruised for two months on a 25-footer, but I would not care to do it today.

Not knowing the exact type of service for which you intend to use the boat, but assuming that you intend to cover the waters bounded by Mackinaw, Beaver Island and Traverse Bay I think sail with auxiliary would be your best bet. A small sloop of 30 or 35 feet should be about right. You *might* find a bargain that has been laid up at some of the small yards along the beach north of Charlevoix or up at the "Snows," but it will take some looking around to get anywhere near your price.

If you had the time and the car the best way to find a cheap job would be to drive along the western shore of Michigan, nosing out all the places where boats are hauled out, and you might run across something, but don't forget ever that a big boat at a low price is often worth less than a small boat at a fair price.

Ordinarily I would suggest contacting a yacht broker, but with the cost limitation they would not give it much attention, so the only way for you to do is to get on the ground and hunt it out for yourself.

CANNIBAL to Christian in the Solomons.

Query: I am trying to learn of the transition of the cannibalistic Solomon Island

natives into God-fearing people. Mainly, I am interested in the roles played by the Catholic missionaries. Can you tell me when they first came, and a little about how they managed to change these people from cannibals, or head-hunters, to Christians.

—Emmett Maum, SK2c
12th Spl. NCB, HQ. Co.
F.P.O., San Francisco, Calif.
U.S. Navy

Reply by William McCreadie:—The Roman Catholic church first appeared in the Solomon group in 1845 when the French mission of the Society of Mary landed on the south coast of San Cristoval, the party consisting of six fathers and five lay brothers under Bishop Epalle. Ere deciding to finally settle on this island the Bishop visited Ysabel. He was murdered later at the mission and so were three members of the mission, and later the island was abandoned. Fifty years later the mission was again established. The church later established various mission centers. The latest figures give the figures as: North Solomons 1550 followers with 11 stations at Choisel and 11 at Shortland. In South Solomons 7226 followers, 88 stations on Guadalcanal, 26 on San Cristoval, 13 on Malaita and one on Cape Marsh.

The work of conversion grew gradually as natives were induced (often with presents of tobacco etc.) to come along. The Malaita natives are the worst and most savage, the interior of the island being as yet little explored. The missions were working energetically up to the war which, I fear, has disrupted the work. However the fathers will quickly resume activities as soon as practicable.

OF POISONOUS fruits — and friendly ones—in the Central American jungles.

Query:—We are planning a three-year scientific trip through the Central American states, principally Panama and Honduras, and Colombia, S. A. right after the war, and we would like to know the poisonous plants and fruits and roots and how and what to treat them with in case we get into them. Also the edible plants and fruits and how to distinguish each by the easiest means.

—Frank N. Perrin,
409 Pontiac Bank Bldg.,
Pontiac, Mich.

Reply by William R. Barbour:—As to poisonous plants, fruits, etc., there really are very few of them. The worst is manchineel, called in Spanish manzanilla (little apple) because its fruits look like green crab apples. The early Spanish explorers tried eating them with unfortunate results, and built up a fund of tradition (such as that you would die if you slept in their shade) that has endured to the present time. Manchineel is poisonous, all right. It is a scrubby tree, with large leathery leaves, growing in a fringe along sandy shores. Any native can point it out to you. Its juice is also poisonous, and the fumes from its burning wood will cause skin eruptions.

Another large tree, the sandbox or jabillo, has a poisonous or at least irritating juice. Its fruits look like miniature pumpkins about 2 inches in diameter. Its seeds are intensely purgative (it and manchineel both belong to the Euphorbiaceae, as does castor oil).

There are several kinds of bad stinging nettles, called "ortiga" by the Spanish. There are two or more kinds of bushes that are kin to our poison ivy, but not nearly so abundant.

I know of no poisonous fruits except the manchineel. Some, that have a gummy juice, are indigestible and apt to cause constipation. Eat what the natives do and you will be all right. And don't eat any fruit without peeling it. I am much more afraid of amoebic dysentery than of malaria, having had both.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

Before the war the two leading falconers in the world were Sir Charles Portal and Hermann Goering. Today, curiously enough, one commands the R.A.F.—the other the remnants of the Luftwaffe. Next month Daniel P. Mannix, who knows as much about the modern sport of hawking as anyone else alive—and what's more can write about it with the punch of a gyrfalcon stooping at a pigeon—gives us—

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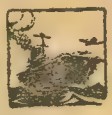
—the fabulous tale of the Nazi marshal's incomparable Greenland hawk—transplanted from the snowy fastnesses of her homeland to hooded slavery in the Reich—and her gallant bid for freedom to soar unleashed once more in the blue deeps above her native peaks and bergs.



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Notice: Many of our *Ask Adventure* experts are now engaged in government service of one kind or another. Some are on active duty in the Army or Navy, others serving in an executive or advisory capacity on various of the boards and offices which have been set up to hasten the nation's war effort. Almost without exception these men have consented to remain on our staff, carry on their work for the magazine if humanly possible, but with the understanding that for the duration such work is of secondary importance to their official duties. This is as it should be, so when you don't receive answers to queries as promptly as you have in the past, please be patient. And remember that foreign mails are slow and uncertain these days, many curtailed drastically. Bear with us and we'll continue to try to serve you as speedily as possible.

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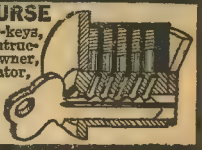

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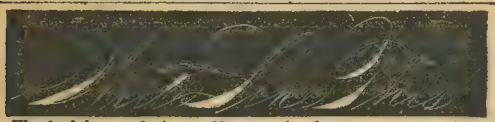

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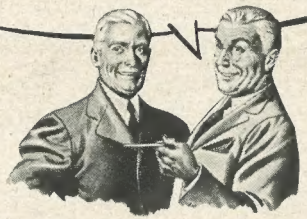

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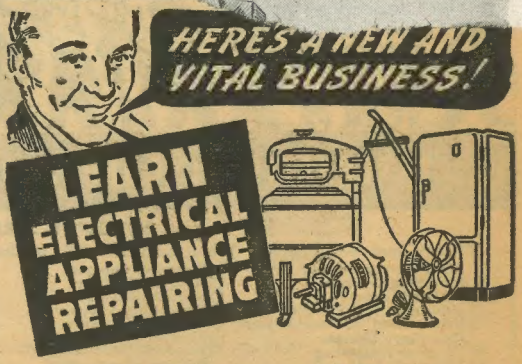

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Name.....*Age*.....*Home Address*.....
Present Position.....*Working Hours*.....A.M. to.....P.M.
City.....*State*.....

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